The TYRANT IN WHITE

HENRY BERMAN

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PHILADELPHIA
HOME PUBLICATION SOCIETY
1217 MARKET ST.

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To All Parents
This Book
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THE TYRANT IN WHITE

CHAPTER I

SHIVERING now and then as they crouched behind an outbuilding of the military academy on a raw March day, two boys were sharing a box of cigarettes. If there was the discomfort of being out of doors, it was amply compensated for by the two-fold joy of breaking the academy rules about smoking, and of doing it at a place which had been closely watched for such a breach of discipline.

This flying in the teeth of likely discovery was just a week old, and had been prompted by the older boy, who had offered in argument:

"All the fellows keep away from this place because they don't want to get caught. So there's going to be a let-up in the watching. It's a place worth trying, Lenny."

After a week of uninterrupted smoking, the younger boy was ready to admit the shrewdness of this guess. He had already paid tribute to his companion in a letter home when he had written:

"Don't be surprised that I've taken up with Bob Maur. He's changing quite a lot, and we get along. I really think he has it over the other boys for cleverness. You know that isn't a new notion of mine."

The mother to whom this letter was sent read it without delight, although her return letter showed no displeasure at the sudden chumming. "Shrewd" was, to her thinking, a better word for "Bob" Maur than "clever." Others who knew him were inclined to be less kind. When they spoke of him they were in the habit of saying, "Oh, he will get on!" But the tone would be loaded with mistrust.

A judgment of this sort is, after all, best tested by the opinions of a boy's companions. In Maur's case, although he had many cronies, they exhibited no deep affection for him. Oversized for his seventeen years, overconfident, and of a bullying nature, he might have spent a very lonely existence at the school but for his unusual athletic ability. This transformed his vices into virtues. Qualities which would ordinarily have made him enemies were looked upon as invaluable for contests with other schools.

In football he invariably left a feeling of rage in his opponents because of foul tactics, without giving the latter the slightest loophole for lodging a complaint with the officials of the game. He was always ready in baseball to spike a good player by sliding to base where there was ample time to reach it on a run. No one could more cleverly foul a runner at a track meet, and he had been disqualified but once in three years of track athletics, despite numerous protests, so well did he cover up his methods.

The applause which all this won him was as hearty in season as out of season. Many looked upon him as destined for a brilliant college career. Even the few upper classmen who had the courage to pronounce him "a dirty player" admitted that he was invaluable to the academy.

There was one in a class lower than his own, however, who was quite free in criticism of this style of play—the slender, nervous boy now sitting at his side, who never hes-

itated to point out the ill-repute which Maur's unsportsmanlike tricks brought the school.

The sudden intimacy of the two, therefore, puzzled their fellows. Their smoking together did not explain it, since it was the younger who did the most of this, with a vim which created unfavorable comment. "If Bob Maur expects Lenny Craigie to fill Eddie Wheeler's shoes as short-stop, he ought to sit down on his cigarettes," was generally remarked when the coming baseball season was under discussion.

Cigarettes had attracted Leonard (or "Lenny") Craigie but fitfully in the past. If he readily went along when Maur became generous in the matter of inviting him to "come and have a smoke," it was out of pride, lest he should face the sneering question, "Are you afraid?"

Pride was one of the qualities in which Lenny differed from Maur. It was that which made unfair play impossible for him. Not that he looked upon this as a distinction in his own favor to be held up for others' applause, but, as he put it: "I get more fun out of being on the square. That's all." He did not see that it was his pride which made it "fun."

Craigie himself was not passed by when the student body took stock of its promising "men." In their opinion, he was on the eve of many things, since he had shown great cleverness in his trials for quarter-back during the previous fall, when only his light weight had kept him out of the regular line-up. And as an infielder in baseball, he was nimble, covered much territory, and was an accurate thrower. Only his light hitting of the ball was against him.

"He ought to make good in a year," was the general verdict. "All he needs is a few more inches and pounds."

He was regarded as impulsive, although not in a self-seeking way. Those in charge of the school liked his remarkably steady brown eyes—and he resented this to some degree because favor with the teachers meant disfavor with one's fellows.

But if ever the latter were inclined to sneer, they took care to suppress it. Sneering was a dangerous pastime in his presence. So extremely sensitive was he that when a sense of injustice mastered him he allowed his temper to leap into the saddle, and then boys much stronger or bigger than he did not care to face him, for he did not know when he was beaten until he had been badly worsted.

Older minds would have said that this impulsiveness would always keep Lenny young, just as they would have put Maur down as a promising politician. Of late this same impulsiveness had allowed Lenny to overlook his frequent "roasting" of Maur's ways, and his frequent accusations that Maur put inferior men on the different teams out of friendship for them.

As things stood, Lenny himself was likely to make the baseball team for that very reason. Bob Maur talked little else than baseball as they squatted behind the outbuilding day after day, smoking, and waiting for warmer weather to admit of baseball practice. In the week which had gone by Lenny had been less and less able to understand why he was being favored by Maur's confidences. But on this particular day Maur had not been as free with talk, and the smoothness of their intimacy was in danger of receiving a jolt when Maur unexpectedly remarked:

"You aren't inhaling! You're doing nothing but stowing the smoke away in your cheeks. You've smoked long enough not to look like the girls on the stage who make

believe they're cigarette fiends. You're afraid to inhale, aren't you?"

Craigie's face became muscle-bound, and there was danger of an outburst. The remark, however, seemed to have been thrown off rather carelessly. There was nothing Lenny felt he could do but to take the "dare," and he inhaled the smoke of the cigarette with a long, loud breath. The next moment he was doubled up by a stifling cough which he could not suppress.

Maur said dryly: "If you don't look out, you'll have the whole school down here."

At this the choking cough became a sputtering. Lenny soon overcame this and resumed his smoking with dignified aloofness. Maur sought to shake his composure by saying:

"I wonder what sort of an example the Colonel would make of us if he caught us. He might know about this and might be saving it all up to soak us so much harder. It would be like him. They switch boys in schools in England for breaking the rules, you know. I'd rather stand that than the line of talk the Colonel hands out. And he smokes himself! Think you could stand a switching?"

"No!" said Craigie, uneasy at the picture his mind had promptly conjured up. "I might bear it for a bang or two; then I'd have to get the switch away."

Maur merely commented, "Oh, you think you would!"

"But I would!" was the reply. Then Craigie complained, "They don't always get the right fellow, anyway. One who's tricky and makes the most trouble is just the one to slip out the easiest. Why, take this smoking. You've been at it for a long time——"

"Catch me overdoing it!" interposed Maur.

"Well, as far as that goes, neither do I. But while you smoked a couple of years without being caught, I no

sooner got a whiff of a cigarette last year than the Colonel hauled me over the coals. And you never had a word said to you! If they catch me this time I'm not even going to pretend that I'll quit smoking."

"You don't intend to keep it up at this rate, do you?" asked Maur, secretly amused, but pretending to be serious.

"Oh, no! It's a sort of dissipation before we settle down to baseball. It hasn't hurt me so far this year, and I've been smoking two or three a day. I don't see the sense of their kicking about a fellow of sixteen using that number."

"Why don't you get up a petition about it?" laughed Maur. "The Colonel might give in."

"Well, he'd be doing an honest thing, for the wonder of it!" Lenny replied with a frown for the laughter.

Maur grew serious. "You don't seem to catch on why this place is run," he said. "If the fellows' mothers knew about the cigarettes, the old man might as well close up shop and shake his military walk. Take your own mother, for instance."

"Oh, of course women don't like tobacco!" said Lenny uneasily. "Mother couldn't stand dad smoking. You've seen the fine cigarette cases he brought home from cruises. A fellow might be twenty, and there would be the same kick."

"They've got their reasons, I guess," Maur argued. "Smoking ain't chewing gum. Who's the champion liar in the school with the yellowest streak in him? Dick Hays! And yet he was held up for a proper, spunky kid when I turned up here!"

"What do you expect with four packs a day?" was the retort.

"Well, what about Joe Cable? He's a moderate fiend,

all right! And he's getting deaf with it. Told me on the quiet that's what a doctor he stole off to see told him."

"Cable is a fine chap," said Lenny.

"Oh, he's that, I guess," replied Maur grudgingly. "But deaf people aren't popular. Anyhow, that's two in my own class. And then, Dolliver fired for stealing! The Colonel was right about him. Cigarettes put him on the toboggan."

Maur now puffed his cigarette with less of an air of boredom, certain that Craigie would lose his temper. He did; and there came with a snap:

"If I wanted to croak like that, I'd throw my cigarette away first!"

The reply was prompt. "Oh, it never hurt me, and it isn't likely to. I've got a constitution that wouldn't balk at a few cigarettes." And Maur pulled the cape of his military overcoat closer about his head.

"You mean to say you're not coddling yourself?" Craigie rebelled against the boastful tone. "You needn't worry about the smoking you're doing. If you thought it was hurting you, you'd scare in a minute."

Maur looked with narrowed eyes at the offender. His answer, however, did not show a trace of ill-feeling.

"Who'd go in behind the bat if I got out of condition?" he asked. "The boys don't understand the work a good catcher has got to put in. I've made several pitchers right here in the academy out of bum material. Butterworth would go to pieces with those rank cigars of his; but didn't I make him toe the mark last year? He's going to pitch great ball this year, too! But I couldn't think of letting Dolley take my place, because he'd never steady him. As captain of the team, no matter who doesn't make good, it's up to me to keep straight. If I did nothing but

read novels like Hale, I'd have a trunkful of cigarettes to keep me company."

And then, very deliberately, he threw his cigarette down and put his heel on it. Craigie kept on smoking, but paused to say, with a smile:

"I might take a notion to do that, too, some time. But I'm not going to scare at a few cigarettes. Why, what about Justin Mahan?" There was triumph in his voice. "What did cigarettes ever do to him? And he was the greatest third baseman that ever went to college! He'd be on top of the heap in professional ball if he wanted to. Even Conny had to give in that all her talk about cigarettes was nonsense when she remembered Justin Mahan's doing five boxes a day."

At the mention of the girl's name, Maur's listless air vanished. All that week he had been patiently smoking with Lenny, in the hope that her name would come up. But Lenny, boy though he was, and uncalculating, had managed to keep it out of their daily talk, because he resented Maur's fondness for the girl.

He had never ceased to be sorely vexed that Conny should have forgiven the bullying she had suffered at Maur's hands when she had lived a tomboy life from six to thirteen, among the boys of her neighborhood. It was true that Maur had begun to regard her altogether differently since he had discovered during the previous summer that she had blossomed into a remarkable young woman. But Lenny's pride demanded that Conny should think of old scores in dealing with her old enemy.

The quick turn Maur now gave the talk was not to Lenny's liking; at the same time it somewhat staggered him.

"Has Conny said anything to you about me?" Maur asked.

"Great guns, Bob Maur, aren't you satisfied with what she says about you in your own letters?" cried Lenny. "Why should you think she would stick you into mine?"

There was a second surprise in store for him.

"She's quit writing to me," Maur replied. "It was because I roasted her for going with all sorts of fellows. Germantown is getting a lot of Philadelphia's riff-raff. It was all right when she was a kid. But it's about time she grew up."

Lenny now had an inkling why Maur had taken up with him, and he decided that since it was to make him talk about Conny, he would do so in a way which would not give Maur much joy.

"She must be mighty sore at your writing that sort of thing," he said, "even though you did get chummy with her up there in Maine last summer. Can't you see the nice thing about her is that she don't put on airs? That's why she forgave you for all your tricks when we were kids together. And here you are trying to make her miserable because she's a good fellow! I guess someone needed a call-down!"

"Cut that, will you!" cried Maur, red with anger. "You come of a good enough family to know that a girl friend of yours should stick to her set. She can't be making friends of everybody! Do you think her aunt likes it?"

"Why not?" asked Lenny. "It's just like Conny to be making friends of everybody. If you only guessed that she had lots of sense, you wouldn't be telling her she was doing the wrong thing."

"The best place for Conny," growled Maur, "is some girls' school five hundred miles from Germantown. These

places near home aren't much good except for fond mammas. If I had my way, I'd be miles away from here. Wait till I go to college! My old man thinks it will be Penn. Not if I know it! Look at the trouble you must have keeping your mother from coming over here every other day!"

"Guess again!" said Lenny, flushing. "It isn't like her!"

"Well, anyhow, that isn't what we started to talk about. If Conny goes up in the air about my wanting to have her act sensibly, I've got nothing more to say!" And Maur got to his feet with a dogged look.

"Oh, you'll write again—differently," said Lenny.

"Who? Me? Don't you believe it!" cried Maur.

Turning on his heel, he stalked off, his head very high. But this did not deceive Lenny, who reflected that if Maur was willing to hang about him for a week to get some news of Conny, he must be hard hit indeed.

"Trying to make a snob of her!" he laughed.

It was almost time to go to the mess-hall, but he preferred to stay out until the last moment, and to do what he had often seen older men do—smoke and muse. The wind had died down; he felt more comfortable, although the cigarette fumes parched his throat.

He considered his chances for the baseball team. They appeared promising. His mother would be glad; Conny would be equally so. He saw himself in all sorts of brilliant plays, with the whole school agape. He would not smoke so much; no one would expect him to when he was in training.

Although he realized that he might have bettered his chances for the team by soothing Maur's feelings about

Conny, he rebelled against this manner of currying favor. He felt that Conny had but repaid Maur in his own coin.

"It's only she who would forgive him for the trouble he made for her," he reflected. "And I guess she'll do it again," he added sadly.

As he got up to go across the campus the cheerfulness he had felt suddenly vanished. He discovered that he had also lost his appetite, and he began to look forward to lying down for a nap.

"That's queer!" he thought, puzzled. "It couldn't be the smoking? Perhaps I *have* overdone it."

Then, somewhat ashamed to have been found wanting where other boys of his age appeared to get along without any complaint, he straightened up as he joined the stream of boys pouring out of the "barracks."

"Lenny," said a pudgy-faced boy beside him while they were entering the mess-hall, "can you give me a lift in my algebra to-night? I'm in an awful hole."

"Don't feel like working to-night. I'm out of sorts," was the answer.

The other mistook his listlessness for curtness, and exclaimed:

"Too thick with Bob Maur to have any use for other fellows, eh? If I couldn't make the baseball team without toadying to Maur, I'd never look at a ball!"

He was seized by the shoulders and flung against the wall. As Lenny lunged at him, the crowding boys hastened to interfere, and managed to pull Lenny off.

"Oh, I'll settle this outside!" he stormed. "If you say I'm thick with Maur for baseball reasons, you're lying! I'll make you eat those words!"

The presence of an instructor quieted him. Before the meal was finished, a note came his way.

"Sorry I said it," was written in a large scrawl. "I don't think you care much for Maur. But I'm not saying it because I'm afraid."

"O. K.," Lenny wrote back to close the incident. "Watch me make the ball team with Maur against me!"

CHAPTER II

CONNY was short for Constance Trevor, and that name was very often on many lips—on those of boys who idolized her, of mothers who were scornful when their sons went visiting to the Breen house, of their fathers, who always found a smile for the laughter-loving girl, and of the neighborhood people in general. Aristocratic mammas constantly had visions of runaway matches, undesirable because Conny's origin was still food for gossip.

This gossip was not shouted from the house-tops, because, although the mother of Conny had made a runaway match, the Breen name stood high in the community, and there existed a wealthy young aunt to give Conny the benefit of her social position. Conny's own share of the Breen wealth would not be small—so rumor had it. But even that could not overcome the shrugs with which the oft-repeated story of her mother's elopement was met. That the exact details of the story were not known mattered little. The story itself, however, was simpler than gossip made it.

Marie Trevor had come home after a runaway match with an actor, to die, a girl of twenty, in the arms of a stern father, and to leave him the charge of her babe. To one—Marie's step-sister Gertrude, a girl of nine when Marie died—the babe Constance was from the first a constant source of delight. But when Gertrude was fifteen, her love for six-year old Conny was to know grave responsibility,

for the spectre of Death came again to that home, to take Mr. Breen himself. A trusted housekeeper was Breen's only ray of hope as death closed in upon him, leaving the girls of fifteen and six without kin to care for them.

During his last moments, there came to Breen the parting injunction of his dead daughter:

"Take care of the child, dad. There will be no one but you! Surely you hold nothing against it! See what a little, helpless thing it is!"

He remembered how he had been tempted to cry, "If you had but married a *man,* not a loose-living actor!"

And now, in his own last moments, Breen appealed to his sobbing, fifteen-year-old daughter:

"Have I not done my best by the little one, Gertrude?"

The answer of the young girl brought him some peace, for he had come to regard her judgment as that of one beyond her years.

And now she needed that maturity in dividing with a governess the care of bringing up Constance. As time passed, those who watched Gertrude Breen grow into a young woman spoke of her many points of resemblance to her father. Her firmness helped her to deal successfully with the light-hearted child in her charge, who was prone to disregard scoldings, and who joined the boys upon all their excursions. The hard task was to be silent when Constance asked questions about her father. Gertrude steeled herself to that silence by her disgust for the mistake her sister Marie had made.

That Marie should have married a man out of her own sphere of life was as nothing to the fact that this man had exerted brutal pressure to turn her into an actress. Gertrude knew little more than this; her father had sought to cover his grief with silence. It was easy to surmise, how-

ever, that Marie had finally fled from the strange life into which she had come. Fortunately, when with the birth of her child, her young life flickered and went out, the shadow of Trevor seemed to be less upon the house. And as Gertrude grew older, she sought to get rid of her curiosity about him.

In this she was in time aided by Conny's own tactful silence. The child, growing into a beautiful girl, often wondered. But when the question would be on her lips, she would look at her aunt, and realizing the devotion Gertrude had given her, would leave that question unasked.

But there came a day when the silence of years was threatened. As Conny sat in the library one afternoon after school, pretending to study, but really debating whether to write to Maur, despite the rebuke of which he had spoken to Lenny, she saw a letter brought in to her aunt. When Gertrude opened it, Conny was startled to see her rise from her seat with a cry.

"What is it, Aunt Gerty?" asked the girl, hurrying over to her.

"Nothing, dear; nothing!" was the tremulous but instant reply. Then Gertrude hastened away to the privacy of her bedroom.

There, very white, she tremblingly reread a letter postmarked "Chicago," and afterwards stood staring at it with terrified eyes. It was from Conny's father! Robert Trevor wrote to ask whether there was a child that bore his name!

For a time Gertrude was stunned by this voice out of a terrible past—a past which she had believed beyond recall. She knew that whatever happened now must destroy the peace she had sought to secure. Either she would have to lie to Trevor, or permit him to meet Conny. She was

frightened by the situation which had developed in so short a time.

There were old friends of the family to whom she could turn for advice; but at that moment her thoughts centered upon one man who was neither old nor could be quite looked upon as a friend. He was the Justin Mahan of Lenny's conversation with Maur, and was one of the many suitors who sought Gertrude's home in the hope that she would say "Yes" to their entreaties.

When Gertrude hit upon Justin as the one who might help her in her dilemma, she blushingly told herself that it was because she wished advice from a lawyer. But there was no escaping the fact that if she chose Justin in this period of need, he would consider that she was saying the necessary "Yes." Robert Trevor thus promised to play a stranger part in Gertrude Breen's life than anyone could have prophesied.

Several times through the long afternoon, as Gertrude waited for evening, she shrank back from the step she was about to take. But her turning to Justin, she knew, was no whim. Anything might have brought that about. At the same time, frightened by the suddenness of this big step in her life, she hoped that Justin would not hurry matters, but would give all his attention to what so much concerned Conny.

Late in the afternoon, the old housekeeper, Mrs. Shepherd, a stout body with a round, grave face, hurried into the room, having been sent there by Conny, who had waited anxiously for her to return from a shopping trip in Philadelphia.

"Well, Gertrude?" Mrs. Shepherd asked, looking keenly at the mistress of the house.

"Conny's father has written!" was the reply. "I am trying to keep it from her."

Mrs. Shepherd sat down heavily, with her mouth wide-open.

"I intend to have Mr. Mahan tell me how far the law can keep Conny out of that man's reach," went on Gertrude.

The housekeeper slowly recovered from her surprise.

"He must not get his finger on the money that is to come to her!" she warned. Then she asked, "But isn't there some older man than Mr. Mahan to advise you, Gertrude?" and immediately discovered that the question was a foolish one, as her extended arms to Gertrude attested.

Gertrude smilingly refused to admit anything, and kept out of reach of those arms for fear she would be forced to make the expected confession.

"Well, there won't be so many people here now," said the housekeeper, as if that was an important consideration. Since Gertrude did not deny this possibility of the dropping away of the many men who courted her, Mrs. Shepherd was ready to cry heartily, "I'm glad!" And she left the room to better digest all the news, as there was no likelihood of Gertrude saying anything more.

Left alone, Gertrude was once more overwhelmed by the significance of Robert Trevor's letter. It was not easy to face Conny, and she turned away a little when the latter knocked to ask permission to go to Mrs. Craigie's for dinner.

"She just telephoned me," the young girl cried. "Sends her love to you, aunty, of course!"

"Go—certainly!" said Gertrude; and as the door closed, she was ready to take herself to task for not having told Conny everything.

There was not the slightest resemblance between the girl growing into a young woman, and her young aunt. Gertrude was tall, dignified, precise, with grave hazel eyes, which at almost all times were sombre. Conny had gray eyes under black lashes, eyes constantly full of laughter, and her growing body would never reach beyond medium height. It was a dancing body, restless, alert, expressionful. If she curled up at attention for a moment, it was with the intensity of a wound spring.

At dinner, Gertrude was not sorry to have her meal out of range of Conny's quizzical eyes. She said but little to Mrs. Shepherd until the meal was finished. Then she told her:

"I will see no one but Mr. Mahan this evening. Have the maid tell anyone else who may call that I am not at home."

"But," Mrs. Shepherd saw a difficulty, and wriggled her stout body in her chair, "suppose he happens to ring the bell just when someone else does?"

"That will make no difference. He will be admitted, and the others not. I can't invite them in, and then try to get rid of them! What a task it would be!"

Nothing more was said. Mrs. Shepherd was a woman of few words. This had allowed Mr. Breen when he was alive to say of her, "Her silence carries great weight," thus slyly referring to her stoutness as well as the still tongue she bore in her head.

In the present instance, she was the more silent because she did not wish to make the mistake of talking tactlessly at a critical time in Justin Mahan's fortunes, which she favored. Her silence concerning the Trevor letter could be patient for another reason. She knew that when Gertrude would have something important to impart, it would not

be kept from her. Mrs. Shepherd reasoned that Gertrude was evidently in great distress. Else why this sudden need of Justin Mahan, who would know how to use his advantage?

Twice the bell rang; and twice Gertrude felt that some disappointed man had taken himself off in a rather puzzled frame of mind. For it was not Gertrude's habit to have them sent away with a brief, "Not at home!"

The next time there was a ring for admission, it was followed by the maid's appearance in the library, where Gertrude was sitting, with the announcement of Justin Mahan's name. He came in with a quick stride, and put out his hand with the hopeful cry:

"Am I to have the chance of finding you alone this time?"

"Yes, you are," replied Gertrude quietly, and colored under his astonished gaze. "I thought of telephoning you to-day—when I remembered that you were a lawyer."

At her invitation, he sought a seat, happy to have become of importance. He was on the alert for her next words. His blue eyes studied her eagerly; and as he sat in the full light, he showed himself an example of the type chosen by American artists as typical of the American—with high cheek bones, a tapering face, and deep-set eyes.

"I want more than your advice," said Gertrude, still standing up. "I want all the help you can give me."

He was on his feet at once, with a little cry, which shook Gertrude as a leaf is shaken by the wind.

"No! No!" she said hastily. "You must be fairer to both you and myself in my need, and must not try to seek any advantage."

Being quite sure that he had an advantage, he could be patient. He hid his great love as well as he could under

the words, "I beg your pardon, Gertrude. It was a poor way to show you that I might be of help."

Gertrude seated herself—somewhat out of range of the lamp on the table. As she looked at Justin, she knew that the die was cast; that no matter whether he would advise soundly or not, that she was for all time after to come to him for counsel. Yet when she began to speak, she had herself well in hand, and talked with quiet earnestness.

"It concerns Conny—and her father," she said. "I will have to withhold a great deal; you will be able to tell whether I am withholding too much. You may as well know that Mr. Trevor is in Chicago, that he is now an invalid, and was an actor; that my step-sister Marie left him because he wished to make an actress of her. We have never heard from him—until to-day. He has written to ask whether there is a child that bears his name. Justin, can he force me to give up Conny?"

He reflected a moment, putting aside his happiness at being brought so close to her in her affairs.

"Suppose we ask ourselves another question?" he replied. "Would you want to have a noise made about this?—since Trevor certainly has it in his power to make a noise."

"No! No!" Gertrude cried. "There has been too much grief already! And I would not want Conny to know about him."

"Do you mean to say she does not know?" Justin asked in surprise.

"Nothing. Have I done wrong, Justin? Should I not have kept her in ignorance? You see, I meant it for the best——"

Justin took a turn about the room. He finally said:

"I doubt whether he could take Conny from you. We

could put up the hardest kind of a fight against that. But there are other things to be considered."

"I know! I know!" said Gertrude, covering her face with her hands. "I ought at last to break my silence, and tell Conny. But I have never forgiven that man, because Marie must have suffered—terribly! I thought to-day that if I told Conny, I might make it possible for him to come and see her every now and then. I feel that I ought not to stand completely between them any longer."

She threw back her head to fight off the tears.

"Do you know," she whispered, "I have even thought to-day of writing that there was no Conny. See how dreadful I am!"

"No. You are only bewildered, because of your great love for Conny," Justin said soothingly. "You feel toward her as a mother would. But spare yourself all qualms of conscience. He may simply be in need of money. If he found there was a child, it might prove an easier method of getting money. You will have to pardon me, Gertrude, for speaking so plainly to you."

"Blackmail?" she said, shrinking back. "You think he is after that?"

"Perhaps I will be better able to tell if you will show me his letter," said Justin.

Gertrude pulled open a drawer of the table with trembling hands, and drew it out. Justin perused the letter under the hood of the lamp.

In a cramped hand was written:

MR. PRESCOTT BREEN,

Dear Sir—When you wrote me sixteen years ago informing me of the death of the woman who had so unfortunately joined her destiny to mine, there appeared to be no reason

for saying anything more, although you gave me your news in a single line.

However, I have never been able to shake off the feeling that there was something else which should have gone into that letter, something of importance to me.

As man to man, I ask of you that you tell me whether there is some child which bears my name.

I am here in Chicago, an invalid, living on the bounty of a friend. Do not believe I have spoken to anyone of the wretchedness I brought your daughter.

But my purpose was not to write of that. If there is some boy or girl of whom I am the father, may I know of it? Most respectfully,

ROBERT TREVOR.

"Confound it!" exclaimed Justin, perplexed. "Why was he so brief? It looks both trustworthy and suspicious." He studied the letter a little longer, and then said, decisively, "Conny must be told. She is old enough. Put the whole case to her. If she stands by you, it will strengthen your position in any legal contest."

"Justin, she would want to have him here right off!" Gertrude cried at once. "The novelty of it would make her thoughtless. You surely know her!"

"If you gave her all the facts?" Justin asked.

"But she will regard all that as past, and will only remember that he is her father. Oh, I would not stand in the way an instant if I were sure that his motives were decent. But how could he have changed so completely since the time when Marie had to flee from him? After all, Conny is mine! mine! It is I who have given my life for her, not he! I was father and mother to her——"

She paused abruptly. The love in Justin's eyes was unmistakable. Her own eyes sought to keep him within the

bounds of the grave problem the day had brought, and forced him to command himself.

"So I cannot let him come in and get some unfair hold upon her," she went on. "I would never forgive myself if I did."

"Well, let me go to Chicago to see him," Justin advised. "In the first few minutes with him I would know my man, and we would steer our course accordingly. We can't delay. That letter may be followed by another, and instead of timidly asking questions, he may begin to threaten. What did Marie say about him? Did your father tell you?"

"She rarely spoke of him, it seems," said Gertrude. "She was like a ghost in the house when she came back, and I think even father was fearful of putting questions. What a strange man this Trevor must have been! For how can one be brutal to a person one loves?"

Promptly Justin declared, "There are all sorts of brutalities. For instance, *you* are silent on a question I would give my life to have answered." He put out a pleading hand. "Won't you answer it?"

"Please, not now, Justin," she begged. "Please, Justin!" Then she said, "I am keeping you from smoking. Don't let me. You will be more comfortable."

"I do want to smoke—badly," he said; "but you are trying to distract my attention. Let us compromise. I promise not to tell you that I love you until the matter relating to Trevor is cleared up. But after that, you will have to listen!"

"I will listen then," she said.

To hide his great joy, Justin drew out his cigarette case, and settled himself composedly in a seat for a smoke, although he was shaking with excitement.

"You have not told me what you think about my intention of going to Chicago," he said, with a glad light in his eyes.

"I will tell you. I intend to go myself. That is the only way that will satisfy me!" Gertrude exclaimed. "I saw it the moment you said you would go. I will make terms with him. The terms will depend on the sort of man he is. I will gladly give him money if that is all he wants —and then I will tell Conny."

"What if he is not that sort of a man?" Justin inquired.

Lowering her head, Gertrude said in a stifled voice, "Then I will have to bring them together. I can't keep up this secret lying everlastingly!"

"She would still remain here, and she would remember all you had done for her," Justin sought to lessen her pain. "As for Trevor, I will arm you with your legal rights in the case, so that you will be prepared to meet any sort of emergency. You can be trusted to carry the whole thing through in splendid style. If I didn't believe that, I would insist on going myself!"

He continued to talk in this strain to give her confidence. Then, before he was aware, he was discussing his own affairs, thrilled to find her listening intently.

"The assistant district attorneyship has come a little closer," he said. "It will take that to make me forget the sort of politics I have to give myself to."

"Are you not disgusted?" Gertrude asked. "Can't you get high position without making this sacrifice?"

"By a means still less honorable—by spending lots of money. No, that won't do. I'm in the thick of the fight, and I will stay in it. But if there is ever a cleaning up of politics, I know where I will stand! But even for that sort of thing, one must have influence. And influence is

bought by knowing all the rungs of the ladder one has to climb. So I must not kick about the appearance of the rungs."

Their talk went on until they heard Conny in the hall thanking a woman—a companion to Mrs. Craigie—who had brought her home. Gertrude, going to the door, called:

"Won't you come in, Mrs. Mulholland?"

Mrs. Mulholland, whose robust person boasted a pair of rosy cheeks and twinkling eyes, stopped in the doorway.

"Thanks, Miss Breen, but I must be going," she said. "I was glad to take the walk and to bring Conny back. Isn't she growing up? No wonder the young fellows in the neighborhood look spruced up all the time. Bless me, she's almost as tall as I am."

There was no pause in her stream of talk, until Justin got a chance to suggest that he would be the one to take her back to Mrs. Craigie's house. Somewhat confused, she looked helplessly towards Gertrude. It was Conny who put in a word here.

"If we had to vote for the most gallant man in Germantown, wouldn't it be Mr. Mahan?" she cried. "Well, I guess!"

"Oh, but I can go home alone!" cried Mrs. Mulholland. "Why should a body like me, who's seen forty-five nine months ago, need an escort?"

As she turned to Gertrude to give some message from Mrs. Craigie, Conny slipped over to Justin, and whispered:

"You haven't massacred all the other fellows, have you?"

"So you believe that's the only thing that would have kept them away from here?" he replied lightly.

She studied him with her head at an angle, until, in

justice to Gertrude, he said, "Your aunt called me in to discuss business."

"That," she said with marked slowness, "*might* be a reason for paying her a visit. Are you going to call often on business?"

"Sh!" he warned, with a glance in Gertrude's direction.

"Oh, she couldn't hear anything—through that cloud of smoke. It ought to be good for the bookworms. Do you know, Lenny Craigie wrote me that he was smoking! Of course, I'm not to tell his mother—although he didn't say *that*. I bet he don't make the baseball team now."

"Don't you know a fellow who was a pretty good third baseman who is responsible for this cloud of smoke?" Justin asked with a smile. "If you can keep a secret, *he* smoked when he was Lenny's age."

"Well, if you are going to come often on business, I'm going to have an electric fan put in, and you can smoke right in front of that. Or get one of those new-fangled vacuum-cleaners."

By this time Mrs. Mulholland was ready to go, and Conny and Gertrude saw her out. When they returned, Conny said:

"Aunt Gerty, guess what Mrs. Mulholland read from the tea-leaves in my cup this evening."

Justin, believing that Conny was up to mischief, which would be a comment on his being alone with Gertrude, said hastily:

"The tea-leaves remarked, very sensibly, that it was unwise for you to indulge yourself with tea at this time of the day. Which reminds me that it must be rather late." And he rose to his feet.

"That's all you know about those tea-leaves!" Conny replied with a toss of the head. "Those particular ones said

that Aunt Gerty would take a long journey—of real importance."

Gertrude started, perceptibly. Justin laughed.

"It's a long time ahead to forecast where both of you will go this summer," he said. "Most prophecies, anyhow, promise long journeys. Particularly those of teacups. And we must remember that Mrs. Mulholland is a sailor's wife, although sailors nowadays have too much to do with steam-engines and electricity to be superstitious."

"I know what you are making long speeches like that for," said Conny.

"Eh?" said Justin blankly.

"You're trying to make me sleepy," Conny declared.

Then she laughingly slipped out, and all Justin could say was:

"She leaves me feeling peculiarly young."

"Now you see why we must not be hasty about telling her!" cried Gertrude. "If she were more serious, perhaps I would have told her long ago!"

"It is true," returned Justin. "At the same time, who can say what change a little responsibility would work in her?"

He was ready to go.

"You have helped me," said Gertrude.

"I dare not believe my luck," he replied.

"I will write to Robert Trevor; but, Justin, I will postpone my visit for two months. Summer will be here by then, and I will have the whole of it away from Germantown to plan—after I have seen him."

"You are a wizard," exclaimed Justin. "Perhaps I am only imagining that I have been of help to you."

She gave him her hand. When he put it to his lips, she said simply:

"Do not fail me now by complicating matters."

So Justin held himself in leash, and suppressed the words he would have spoken.

As he walked down the street, he was unconscious of anything but the great joy which suffused him. It was intoxicating, and he laughed loudly.

"What a day this has been!" he said again and again.

As he stopped at a gas lamp to light another cigarette, he suddenly staggered, and was forced to seize upon the iron post for support. Everything before his eyes became wild confusion, and in the waving mass he felt his footing uncertain.

"Good God!" he gasped at last, as his vertigo began to lessen.

The perspiration stood out in beads on his forehead. He waited before he attempted to walk on, but was hurried into going for fear of being regarded as drunk by a chance passerby. Drawing a deep breath, he sought to walk firmly, incidentally throwing away the cigarette he had lighted.

"Can it be the smoking?" he wondered, conscious of the insomnia which had beset him for several nights past.

"Nonsense! Nonsense!" he waved off the thought. "It's to-night's excitement on top of my overwork. There's nothing the matter with me. Just overwork; that's all!"

At the Breen house, Gertrude had gone up to Conny's bedroom, and had discovered that personage comfortably fixed for a spell of reading. Fearing a rebuke, Conny was prepared to put up a defense for the propped-up novel. None was needed, for Gertrude sat down at the bedside, and put an arm about her.

Conny snuggled against her, and shut her eyes as in

younger days when she would find rest in the circle of her aunt's arms.

"Listen, dear," began Gertrude; "I have come for a talk. You must be quite serious. Oh, I know I owe you more than these occasional few words, for there must be times when you are really lonely! After all, I'm only an aunt to you. It's a poor substitute for a mother—and a father! Will you always believe that my love prompted me to do all I could for you?"

Conny, amazed, cried in alarm:

"Oh, Aunt Gerty, are you thinking of getting married?"

Gertrude said hastily, "No! But what difference in my love for you would that make? You're to stay with me until *you* are married."

With a great sigh of contentment, Conny curled in closer to her, and nestled there. To Gertrude this was almost torture, for her conscience kept crying:

"Why have you never spoken to her about her father? Why are you trusting to chance to right things?" And Gertrude, afraid, murmured, "I have managed stupidly!"

She looked with sorrow at the dark head against her shoulder, and touched it lightly with her lips.

Suddenly Conny said, "Do you know, it often seems to me that mother comes into this room. Her picture over there is so natural, that I can see her right at my side here by just closing my eyes. I never see father. Oh, I know he wasn't good to her, or you would have talked about him. Yet I think *I* would have loved both of them."

Gertrude could find nothing to say. Her emotions almost stifled her. When the silence threatened to become unendurable, she managed to get out:

"It is true that I was only a step-sister to your mother, but no one loved her more dearly. If I have been silent

about certain things, it has been out of great love for you. Will you always remember that, if anything is not clear to you? And if trouble should come, there are always these arms to protect you, dear."

"What! Worry you with my troubles?" cried Conny. "If I have any, I'll laugh hard at first, and see what that will do——"

"Oh, I must have you more serious!" demanded Gertrude.

"And may I not laugh when I want to? Why, it would even do you good to laugh, aunty!" came in the most serious of tones.

"Yes, yes, be happy, dear!" said Gertrude hastily. "Laugh if you want to—always. If you can get happiness for the asking, try to get it."

"Ugh! That sounds like Mrs. Mulholland and the teacups!" And Conny pretended to shiver, although the next moment she was saying all sorts of endearments to her aunt, down whose cheeks the tears were coursing.

Conny tried by a stretch of the imagination to connect Justin Mahan with this strange breakdown on Gertrude's part. Then she reversed the order of things by holding her aunt closely, and rocking her, until Gertrude became aware of this turn-about, and released herself.

"Go to sleep, dear," she said. And then she asked as she stood up, "Would you want to go to Europe for the summer?"

"Phew!" came from Conny in a shrill whistle to express her extreme delight.

A little later, Gertrude was penning the following letter:

DEAR MR. TREVOR—

Mr. Breen has not been with us for some years. So I took the liberty of opening the letter you sent him.

It is a very important letter, and I believe that the only way in which I could do it justice is by coming to see you. I will be in Chicago during June. You will receive a letter previous to my arrival.

Very truly yours,
GERTRUDE BREEN.

"In two months," Gertrude reflected, "I will be prepared for anything! If I have to fight for Conny, I will do it—with all my strength!"

She folded the note-paper into an envelope, and put it under lock and key until morning.

CHAPTER III

THE name of Craigie is a deathless one, not only in the American navy, but wherever, the world over, stories of courage are narrated. Its fame had preceded Lenny when he went to the military academy, and during his first weeks there he had often been made to recite to wondering students the heroic deed of the Captain who was his father. And the same story is retold to-day where naval men congregate.

It had to do with a certain afternoon in May, when Lenny was but three. The cruiser Niagara was coming up the Atlantic coast with Captain Craigie in command. Suddenly the crew was startled by a muffled report. At the sound, the Captain flung away the cigarette he was smoking, and hurried on deck.

Flames were shooting from a turret. Below this turret lay the magazine! Fire-quarters had been immediately sounded, bringing the men to the various stations in the twinkling of an eye, but it was an unhappy crew, for the magazine over which the flames were playing could not be reached by the flood-cocks and put under water. It promised to be only a question of time before the cruiser would be strewn over the ocean.

Captain Craigie's first command was to head the ship for the beach, which lay near by. Meanwhile, the men flung

buckets of water through a scuttle in the door of the turret, but to properly reach the flames the door would have to be opened—an impossible procedure, for this would create a draft which would only hasten the explosion.

All watched with sinking hearts the futile attempts to check the blaze by means of the fire-buckets. A hose was now ready; but to be effective, it would have to be directed against the flames from within the turret. For this purpose, someone would have to crawl through the eighteen-inch scuttle into the small room. Every moment of delay meant the surer approach of the flames to the magazine, and final destruction.

The Captain looked about at the men waiting for some word of command from him. The suggestion on his lips, that one of them go through the scuttle into the blazing turret with a hose, was never spoken. He could not force himself to send any man to threatening death, either by request or order.

Flinging away his cap, he strode over to the door, and with a single effort sent his slim body through the scuttle. This move on the part of the head of the ship was so unexpected that it left the bluejackets and officers too astounded to interfere. Then not only was it too late to head off the Captain, but no one could follow him, lest his only avenue of escape be blocked, and return made impossible.

A bluejacket had been self-possessed enough to thrust the hose into the aperture through which the Captain had disappeared. The few seconds during which the latter was able to make out anything in the blinding smoke and to seize upon the nozzle, seemed to stretch into long hours for the silent staring men. Then the hose was drawn within; and there, in the midst of the flames, alone with death,

Captain Craigie began his fight—below him the magazine with its tons of explosives, above him a pall of smoke.

Outside stood trembling men, agonized by the uneven combat, and watching for either a lessening of the flames or the cry, "Open the door!" It seemed impossible that the Captain should win single-handed against the blaze. The men were conscious that any moment might sound their death-knell, for a spark in the magazine would bring the catastrophe.

At last the flames appeared to lessen. The men held their breath, unable to believe their good fortune. Then came in a muffled voice:

"Open the door!"

Was the Captain about to retreat, beaten, unaware that he had been close to success? Or had he really conquered the flames? The door was pulled open. The figure that staggered out was in a smoking uniform. The face was blackened, the hair singed. The hands were bruised and burned, and bled through the grime with which they were covered. Captain Craigie had fought with his hands as well as with the hose. But behind him the smoke was clearing away. The flames had been beaten down!

Eager arms caught the fainting man, who was carried to his cabin, while officers and bluejackets burst into wild cheers, which they took up again and again. Pandemonium reigned. The men yelled, and slapped each other on the back, and forgot rank and dignity.

But Captain Craigie was not to escape unscathed. Before a year was out, he was forced to secure sick-leave, which he continued until he resigned from the navy. Physicians feared for his heart. He was advised to give up smoking, of which he had made a habit during his early cruises in the Mediterranean. The shock he had

undergone in the turret demanded a composed life, a condition the Captain's nervousness made impossible, and he fretted away his days in his library, deftly rolling his cigarettes as he had been taught by the Spaniards.

His task, as he brooded over his idleness, was doubly hard, for he had to wear a smiling countenance to brighten his wife—a beautiful, frail woman. The only touch of color in their lives was young Lenny, who promised to inherit nothing of the physical disability of either side of the house. His innumerable antics robbed many days of their bitterness for the Captain. The latter rested easy when he remembered how his money, well invested, would take care of the boy when he should have to face the world.

"We won't make a soldier or sailor of him," he would say to his wife. "Years of peace on board of a warship or in the army won't satisfy him. There was never a chap as restless as he at six. No, he's got to have a profession that will keep him on the go all the time."

There came a day when the Captain did not rise from his bed. He lay very still, with the final sleep of death upon his eyelids, while his wife and boy clung wildly to each other in their loneliness. All the praise which follows the passing of a man who has done a brilliant thing, only saddened Mrs. Craigie. Her existence became an untiring devotion to Lenny, who in turn fairly worshiped her.

The shifting scenes of these years passed quickly through her mind as she waited on a bright May day for the home-coming of Lenny from the academy for his third summer vacation. She had risen from a bed of pain to watch the road up which he would travel in the cab. As she relived the past and dwelt on the future, she was less conscious of her physical distress. It appeared trifling alongside of the griefs which she had borne and the re-

sponsibilities which the future would bring. She regretted not having gone to the station to meet Lenny.

Mrs. Mulholland bustled about, smiling and chattering, her talk about the boy's home-coming being broken by a lengthy reference to Gertrude Breen's departure for Chicago, of which she had learned from Conny.

Mr. Mulholland had served under Captain Craigie, and had paid with his life for a brawl in South America. His career as a bluejacket had been a distinguished one; his record of three rescues from drowning, of which Mrs. Mulholland boasted, was no invention on her part. And when Mulholland proved slower than a Spanish stiletto, Captain Craigie had the widow established as the companion of his wife.

Had a stranger come upon Mrs. Craigie as she sat on the porch, he might have addressed her as "Miss." The face was young, and its steady, luminous brown eyes were like those of the boy for whom she was waiting. Her black hair was simply parted in front, and gathered up in a great heap at the back, so heightening the suggestion of youth.

The house itself was two-storied, and covered much ground—too much for the simple tastes of its mistress. Through the trees could be seen the weather-vane of the Breen residence, with its castellated roof. Green leaves, green vines, green trees mingled in the sunlight to flood the avenue and its houses with a riot of color. Only snatches of talk and the heavy tread of Mrs. Mulholland disturbed the silence, the trooper-walk of that lady being one of the unconquerable faults in her struggle for lady-like qualities.

She suddenly startled Mrs. Craigie by hinting that Lenny might be turning his attention somewhat to girls.

"The boys weren't much older, not a bit, when they came courting *me!*" And Mrs. Mulholland started off for a five-

minute word-jog, which broke into a trot, then a gallop, and wound up in a helter-skelter of words as she neared the subject of Jack Mulholland.

Mrs. Craigie listened absently, her ears only for the sounds of the road. She was slightly anxious; the last few letters from Lenny had been less cheerful in tone than usual, despite the fact that the thought of vacation days had, in the past, always made him wildly happy. He spoke of some sudden increase of work at the school as if it had proved too much for him. She had seriously considered telephoning the authorities at the academy to find out what this extra pressure at the end of the school year meant. Instead, however, she had advised Lenny not to overwork in any scramble for marks.

Up the road at last came a cab, with a familiar head sticking out of the door. Mrs. Craigie exclaimed:

"Nance, he is here!"

Mrs. Mulholland hurried down to meet him. He leaped out, shook hands with the beaming woman, and hurried past her to his mother. The two embraced and clung to each other until Mrs. Craigie suddenly held him off from her in alarm.

"You have been smoking!" she cried.

"Dear mother, I must settle with the man if we are ever to get a chance to talk," was the "grown-up" answer that met her. He immediately sought to soften this by saying, "Maybe I'm not glad to be home, mamsy!"

He paid the cabman, and giving his arm to his mother, helped her into the house.

"I know you've got something in the dining-room for me!" he cried. "Catch me taking time to wash up! That ten minutes of train ride didn't blacken me. Honest, it

didn't! And after the academy rations, a bite with you would really spell home!"

He fell to with a relish, all the while smiling at his mother, and repeatedly appealing to Mrs. Mulholland to agree that her mistress was more beautiful than ever. Soon he was acclaiming his delight in getting away from school work.

"If it was only a real military academy, mother!" he said depreciatingly. "I don't suppose one out of the whole bunch is really thinking of going to West Point or Annapolis! And all the drilling and sham battles—oh, what shams!—don't interest the fellows. I'd like to go somewhere else, if you'd let me."

"But you surely would not want to leave the many friends you have made at the academy!" said his mother.

"Oh, that wouldn't worry me a minute!" he replied. "I haven't been awfully thick with many fellows. Maur is the sort they're fond of. If I had the muscle, they'd toady to me, too. Not that I'd like it, mind you!"

"I didn't suppose you would," said his mother softly. "But I thought you were getting along with Maur."

"Oh, I tried hard! But I don't like any guesswork when I'm making friends; and he kept me guessing. Why, I'd have made the baseball team, mother, if he hadn't been captain! Now you've got his measure! And the fellows sided with him when he chose Sinclair shortstop instead of me. I was done with them then! I wouldn't mind a bit if I thought Sinclair had played a better game! Maur would have all sorts of balls batted in my direction, and then jump on me for an occasional error. When I did do well, he said I was erratic—as if it was all accidental! Well, you can guess how it wound up. He got my nerve, and I went to pieces two days running. But before I was

ready to quit—I saw it was Sinclair for shortstop sure then—I got into practice the next time, and accepted chances a professional would have side-stepped. The boys clapped. But I was 'erratic,' you know! So Maur claimed. And I dropped out. But say, mother, maybe I haven't got a bully baseball scheme for this summer!"

"But what did your baseball have to do with your breaking with all the friends you once had?" asked his mother.

"Well, I suppose I wasn't pleasant after being kept off the nine. It doesn't make a fellow happy to lose, you know."

"And is it on account of that you want to change schools, Lenny?"

"N-no, not altogether," he said slowly. "But I'd rather go somewhere where they are more in earnest. I'm tired of the fake front they put on in the academy. There are other fellows there who are sore about the place. I'm not the only one."

His mother sat as if spellbound under this new language, until a light dawned upon her mind.

"Have they been very disagreeable there about enforcing the rules against smoking?" she asked.

Lenny blinked a little as he replied, "I guess a fellow can smoke 'most anywhere if he wants to."

In the silence which fell upon mother and son, Mrs. Mulholland broke in by speaking of Conny, but the name fell on deaf ears, thus somewhat shattering Mrs. Mulholland's romantic notions. When the dainties on the table ceased to tempt Lenny, his mother said in a grave manner which made him wonder:

"Let us go to your father's room."

He helped her up the stairs to the library where Captain

Craigie had spent his last days. On the wall between two windows was a portrait of the Captain in uniform. Below it hung a large photograph of the Niagara riding at anchor. A letter from the President of the United States, commending the brave deed performed in the turret, was draped in the country's colors, and hung beside the medal presented by Congress for that act.

The other walls were covered with rare objects brought from the four corners of the globe. There were several cabinets of curios, and a good library, consisting mainly of sea-literature. Through the windows of the room could be seen the trees in full foliage, which cast a soft light within the room, and made it, despite the odd appearance of foreign objects, a place where one might find peace from the world itself.

Mrs. Craigie pointed to the seat she wished Lenny to take. It faced the portrait of his father. With her hand on her boy's shoulder, she said:

"There is something I ought no longer keep quiet about, Lenny. It will not do to postpone it. You know what it is. I must speak about your smoking."

She pretended not to see his annoyance, and went on, "I thought of nothing else while you sat at the table, my dear boy. No, I'm not going to lecture you! Don't think that! I'm just going to tell you something of which you have been ignorant."

Very restless, Lenny was ready to break in and make light of the whole thing; but he was impressed by his mother's grave earnestness.

"I knew, Lenny, that you would pick up the habit," she said. "Did I look very frightened to-day when I found that you had? Oh, there was reason—a reason brought home to me by terrible experience!"

Lenny was bewildered by the grief she showed.

"It was that habit, dear, which helped to kill your father," she finished tremulously.

Lenny became pale, and sat as if stricken. As he slowly caught the full significance of what he had heard, his jaw fell. He was the picture of wretchedness, and his voice was a whisper when he asked:

"You—you mean it, mother?"

"Yes! I knew all along, but your father would not believe it. He thought the physicians had frightened me without cause."

Lenny lowered his eyes .before his mother's evident struggle to master her tears. She resumed:

"When your father stirred the whole country by his deed on the Niagara, he was already far from a strong man. It must have been the years of cigarette smoking. Those few terrible moments in the turret would never have harmed him as much as they did except for that. And on top of it all, he had a weak heart. His heart trouble found an easy victim! I know you believe me, my boy!"

"Why, yes, I do," he replied, in hardly audible tones.

"He was more than a brave man," went on his mother: "he was always a kind and considerate one. His crew loved him. He treated them like a father, and was always fair. He did not play the autocrat like other officers. And that incident on the Niagara was not the first time he showed what big things he could do. When he was at Annapolis, he took on his own shoulders the blame for something for which three other men were responsible; and when they did not have the courage to own up to save him from trouble, he never complained, even though it almost cost him his career in the navy. I would not have known about it hadn't one of those men come clear across

the country, just before your father died, to ask his forgiveness."

Some moments of silence intervened. Then Mrs. Craigie concluded:

"He could do these wonderful things, yet he could not shake off a habit that sapped his very life!" She put out a hand to Lenny, and pleaded, "Surely *you*, my boy, will not continue that habit!"

The promise sprang to his lips—but he withheld it. When he spoke, nothing could have shown his mother more decidedly how he had aged during the last year than his words:

"If I said I wouldn't, and then I did smoke, it would be the worst kind of lying, wouldn't it?"

She waited, and he went on, "Father smoked a great deal; I won't. I'll most likely have to smoke a little at college. Everybody does. Only it would be a pipe, I guess. Don't make me promise that I'll quit altogether. I would only be getting ready to lie! I'll stop for a little while; I give you my word for that. I wasn't overdoing it, you know——"

"Ah, but your father believed he was not overdoing it!" cried his mother.

"Well, but you must remember that he had a pretty dull time of it when he was cruising, and he had to do something!" argued Lenny. "I'll be too busy when I get to studying law. No, you mustn't worry about me, mother! Of course you're right; but you bet we're going to be sensible!"

To her, as he sat there arguing, his voice and manner brought his father back vividly. She debated whether to apply pressure, or to rely upon his honesty. Would he be able to control the habit? As she looked at the intense

figure still talking, she was not sure; but she sought to control her fears.

"Dad," he was saying, "must have smoked when he was a small boy."

"Oh, but it isn't when one *begins* a habit!" his mother warned. "It is easy enough for you to believe that you will give it up when you please! Yet he could not! You must grow up to be a strong man, Lenny, able, and masterful, sure of yourself, complete in mind and body! It is because cigarettes may keep you from being any of these things that I am pleading with you. Your father would have been an admiral—and he threw the chance away! God knows I am not saying it out of lack of love and loyalty to him! But he did throw his whole life away! So I must warn you, Lenny. You must not remain in ignorance of so vital a thing!"

Lenny was racked by the struggle going on within him. But the more the matter was brought home to him, the less ready he was to promise, because of the honesty of his nature.

He was afraid, far down in himself, that he would not be able to stick by his word. He feared that lying would be followed by more lies. It was partially a confession of the hold the cigarette already had upon him. All that seemed left to him was to hide that fact and to begin a silent fight against the habit. To promise to cease smoking altogether appeared to him less sensible than to break off little by little.

He started as his mother laid her hand on his, and was miserable under her look of complete trust. He threw himself into her arms, crying:

"Oh, I'll try not to let it get a hold on me! I'll try."

His mother stroked his hair, and said, "I know you will!"

Immediately after, as if it was the most natural thing in the world to say on the heels of this, she suggested, "You must want to see your room. There have been some changes there. I think you will approve of them."

Stifling under the trying situation which had developed so soon after his home-coming, Lenny was thankful that his mother allowed him to go to his room alone. She was now equally glad to be alone. Her day of thrilling expectancy had revealed an abyss. It frightened her, although she kept telling herself that there should be no cause for alarm when dealing with a conscience as strong as Lenny's.

She saw only one sensible course open to her—that of having him as much a friend as a son. If she showed her trust, if she made a practice of facing him with confidence, she might call forth in him a full sense of responsibility which would serve him for all times.

"He must feel that he can come to me always without any concealment," she said. "I must have him respect me, and to do that, I must show that I respect him. I must prove myself above suspicion!"

She would have been satisfied had she seen Lenny's box of cigarettes sailing out of the window as soon as he reached his room. He hardly looked about him. Instead he sat down, with his feet on the window-sill, and pondered what he had just heard. An hour passed before he attempted to find an argument in favor of his weeks of smoking.

"Dad must have started earlier than I to let it get such a hold on him," he said. "And then, with the quantities of cigarettes he used, no wonder it affected his heart! No, dad can't be my example—dear dad! It all depends on the man. Doesn't Justin Mahan smoke? I wouldn't

overdo it. And if it ever hurts me, I'll quit. Can't blame mother, though! Phew, what a lot she's been through! But there are plenty of worse habits boys pick up that I haven't got. Isn't mother fine? No one could have been more careful about not hurting a fellow's feelings!"

And so his thoughts rambled on, slowly getting around to his father's exploit on the Niagara. He pictured the deed in a new light—with his father struggling at the same time against physical weakness. It did not tend to make his father less the hero. Instead Lenny seemed to come closer to him.

A naval career never loomed more interesting, but Lenny put away the idea. He had a secret ambition which made this out of the question; it was to be Justin Mahan's law partner at some future time. He had kept his eye on that man's doings from the day Conny began reporting his visits to her aunt. It was Justin's cordiality which had won him, coupled with the fact that the lawyer had rowed a good oar at college, and had done still better on the baseball field. Justin did not have a stronger sympathizer than Lenny in his efforts to win Gertrude.

Having once seen him speak at a public meeting, Lenny ever afterwards found a fascination in the thought of a political career, with its appeal to large audiences. He often, in imagination, faced these crowds.

As he sat and thought of these things, Lenny's mind leaped enthusiastically to the baseball project of which he had spoken to his mother, and on which he had spent many spare moments since its conception. It had come to him during the bitterness of his defeat for a place on the academy team, and was first planned to prove that he could outgeneral Maur when it came to baseball. The scheme had, however, gotten to be of such importance that Lenny no

longer thought of it in the light of proving anything, but sought to make it effective for its own sake.

He intended to organize a number of baseball clubs in the poorer section of Germantown, as well as to secure grounds for their daily practice and weekly matches, and to pick from these clubs several teams to contest the best amateur ones in Philadelphia proper. He intended to see to it that these teams were supplied with balls, bats and clubs, and that they were rewarded with prizes for good playing. He believed that the encouragement of this sport would be a help to the boys of the section, who might eventually contribute to the ranks of the professional baseball in America.

"And I'll do it if I have to stay here the whole of summer!" he declared.

CHAPTER IV

GERTRUDE'S stay in Chicago had not been a brief one, yet during the entire time Justin received no word from her about the result of her mission. He awaited her return with more than an attorney's interest in a client. She had been silent when, on the eve of her going, he had pleaded that she should come back with her mind made up about *him*. But when he had put her on the train, she had said:

"Before I can begin to consider my own future, I must be free of all worry."

These words had shown him how much depended on her interview with Trevor; and so her silence left him disquieted. Why had she not written? Had matters come to a bad pass? Then surely she needed his services more than ever!

Relief came with a telegram giving the time of her return train; and Justin met the "Chicago Limited" at North Philadelphia. When he approached Gertrude on her descent from a Pullman car he found her weary, unhappy and at first but little inclined to talk. He took a cab and drove to a café in the heart of the city, where they could be alone.

When the waiter had departed with their order, Justin asked:

"Well?"

She leaned back in her seat and said, "I don't know

whether I have acted like a fool! Yet there did not seem to be any other way out of it. After my first interview with him, I believed myself frightened, so I remained in my hotel for two days before venturing to see him again."

As she paused, Justin said:

"Suppose you begin at the beginning. When you go over the course you have pursued, you will be able to see how you have managed."

She told him, "I went to the house, and found him installed in a small room. He was a nervous wreck—not a very proud one. He must be fifty, although he easily looks ten years older. I can't understand how he ever fascinated Marie!——"

"Fifteen years will work many changes," said Justin.

"Well, he looked at me in a sad way. Then he murmured, 'So you are Marie's sister! Marie's sister!' And then, suddenly, he was crying—just like a child. I told him of Conny. It popped out before I knew it! At once he was changed. It made him so eager, that I grew frightened, and I said I would have to go—that I would be back in a day or two, after I had arranged certain things. I did not lie. It was my thoughts that I had to arrange. They were in such a whirl!"

Justin was tempted to lay his hand on hers. But the waiter brought their order at this moment. When Gertrude resumed the story of her meeting, she was calmer.

"I went there two days afterwards. He told me about his harshness to Marie. He did not spare himself. Then he asked me about Conny. After that he sat like a man in a dream. At last he asked, 'Can you come to-morrow? I am not strong, and this has shaken me rather badly.'

"So I went the next day. I guessed that there wasn't much money in that house. Still, Justin, I could not offer

any to the husband of Marie. He did most of the talking, because I was rather helpless. I had come to offer resistance, to meet him harshly if necessary—but there was no one to fight! I got to wondering whether he might not be allowed to get a glimpse of Conny—in some way. He—well, he said that the thought of seeing her unnerved him; that he was satisfied to know that she existed. He asked for a photograph of her—asked me to send it. And with that was ready to bid me good-by! I can still see him standing with outstretched hand."

Justin stared at the dreamy eyes before him, surprised at this strange ending to the difficult journey Gertrude had undertaken.

"Well, things have certainly not gone against us!" he said.

"Ah, Justin, but he is coming here!" cried Gertrude.

Mahan was dumbfounded at this sudden turn. But in a moment all traces of the effect it had upon him were gone. He asked, as if her course had been the most natural in the world:

"How did you arrange it?"

"He is to come here under an assumed name—as a brother of Conny's father."

"How much of that suggestion was yours?" asked Justin.

"Most of it, I think. I got to the point where I wanted him to come to see her under some name—not his own. He was afraid of the idea. I could see that, Justin! 'As a relative then,' he finally conceded. It must sound to you as if I had been stupid. When you see the man, you will understand everything!"

Justin weighed his words before he spoke; then he said:

"Was there anything in his manner to remind you of his career as an actor?"

"Well, his voice would get dramatic when he was moved. But, oh, Justin, I am sure that I did not allow him to deceive me!" was the way she fought the suspicions he had aroused in her mind.

"You are sure that you were not watching a fine piece of acting?" he asked impressively to force her to look back.

"No! No! He could not have gone about it in that way! I showed him from the beginning that I could be firm—although I could be just at the same time. Everything will work out all right, Justin. I am confident it will!"

"If it does not, it will not be because I will fail you!" he reassured her. "The first false move he makes here is sure to alienate Conny's sympathy. As for the rest—well, we must expect that serious conditions will bring serious remedies. When is he to come?"

"Next week. He will be near Conny! Justin, do you realize that? Where father and Marie never dreamed he would come!" she said in a voice of awe. Then she wailed, "But even that will not stop the lies! To be everlastingly deceiving Conny about something so important to her!"

"Never mind that just now," said Justin. "We must plan how to keep Trevor from playing too important a part when he does come. You must arm yourself with a thorough knowledge of how he treated Marie. I will consider the legal moves we might make in case of trouble. If he is playing some game, I wouldn't lay odds on his success! You had better inform Conny to-day of the coming of her 'uncle.' That will explain your visit to Chicago."

Summing up courage to tell her lie, Gertrude faced Conny's welcome home with a hasty:

"I had such a time, dear! And I've asked an uncle of yours, on your father's side, to come and stay with us for a while."

"Goody!" came with a shout. Then Conny fell silent, as she guessed that further talk would only bring up her father's name. She tingled with happiness, however, to have someone to whom she might speak of him.

Of all the boys who called at the house only Lenny was regaled with the news of the promised visit of "uncle." He displayed no enthusiasm, however, because the visitor was certain to use up a considerable amount of Conny's time.

"You don't mind my smoking, do you?" he asked gravely, as he produced a box of cigarettes.

"Oh, I shouldn't think *I'd* be the one to mind!" was the quick reply.

Lenny lighted a cigarette, and tilting his chair against the wall of the porch, said, "It's my third since I came home. That's five days, you know. Would you call me a cigarette fiend, miss?"

"Oh, I'd call you an amateur," said Conny. "Let it go at that!"

"I'll stay one," said Lenny; and added, "Seeing that I'll be in college in about two years, I thought I'd smoke some of the green out of me."

"Oh, there'll be green *over* you—green turf—if you try to get *all* the green out of you that way!" was the rejoinder.

Lenny frowned. How could the girl talking so carelessly know the terrible struggle the three cigarettes had cost him?

"You're awfully solemn these days," she said.

"I've got my mind full of a scheme," was the reply. Then he hastened to square himself, seeing how crestfallen

she was: "I can't tell it to you until I've seen Justin Mahan."

Bob Maur and several other boys hove into sight. In the rattle of talk which followed, Lenny sat silent, because the boys were boasting of their athletic successes during the past year. When one asked him where he intended spending the summer, he said:

"Here in Germantown, I think."

At once the talk ceased, and everyone, including Conny, eyed him in surprise, fully aware that he was not remaining at home for want of money. At the same time they could guess if he were forced into staying, he would be the last one to speak of it so readily.

"Is it that scheme?" asked Conny; and then she could have bitten her tongue off for speaking of it before the others.

"Planning an opposition military academy to the Colonel's?" Maur got out easily, as if he and Lenny were not at dagger's points.

"Oh, I wouldn't think of it unless you came and ran all the teams, and your friends turned up to fill all the nice places on them!" was the reply.

Everyone present grew tense. The two principals were equally so. There was a retort on Maur's tongue; but he preferred to have Conny find him courteous just when she would expect him the very opposite.

She sprang into the breach by crowing lustily, and then proclaiming:

"If anybody dares to make a sound like that, he goes home quicker than a wink!"

It was a threat which enforced peace. She followed it up by turning the talk into calmer channels.

Later, when Lenny took himself off, he could not regret

his words, try as he might. Maur's treatment of him during the academy's baseball season still rankled. Lenny was only sorry that he might have created the impression of having taken Conny into his confidence about this.

He waylaid Justin Mahan at the corner where the latter usually appeared on his way home from the office.

"Hello, Lenny!" came with a smile, and the thrust of an arm for a hand-shake. "Going my way?"

"Long enough to get something off my mind," was the reply.

Then Lenny plunged into an account of his baseball project, to which Justin listened with mounting surprise. Finally the older man stopped, and slapped Lenny on the back, crying:

"By George, but you're a schemer! It looks all right, too. Don't worry if a whole lot of people don't contribute money. Come to me. It oughtn't to require a large sum, anyhow. Do you mean to say you will stay on all summer if necessary?"

"If nothing else will do! I think the boys will stand management, don't you?"

"You're democratic enough to get along with them," said Justin.

Then he was struck with a thought. Would not Lenny's project be an excellent way of appealing to the voters of that district through their children? Why should not he co-operate with the boy?

The next moment he was saying to himself, "Not a bit of it! I'll not play at that sort of politics!" But he suggested to Lenny, "If you ever run for a political office at this end of Philadelphia, what you intend to do this summer might prove of help to you. Boys grow up and make voters, you know."

He was amused when he noted how thoughtful the words left Lenny. But the latter, too, was soon repudiating the idea that he was to seek any personal gain out of the venture.

"The boys need it, and that's all I'm doing it for," he insisted stoutly. "It's for the good of the place."

"Ah, that's what all politicians claim!" Justin replied with a twinkle in his eye. Then he ceased to poke fun at Lenny. "Stick by your plan, old man, no matter what opposition you find. If the traveling gets too rough, why, call me in! I'll try not to inject politics into it," he wound up with a smile.

Lenny caught his mood and laughed. When they separated, he walked home as if on air. As yet he had not revealed the project to his mother, in his desire to be surer of the details. That evening, however, he was ready to spring the plan.

He had a host of compliments for his mother when they sat down to dinner. She was undeniably beautiful in her dress of black, with her brown eyes quite dark in contrast to her pallor, and her slender form youthful.

"And you are looking stronger, too," he insisted.

"I will surely believe it, now that you are going to tell it to me for a whole summer," she said in return. "This evening we are going to plan for our long holiday together."

"Already?" he cried.

"Isn't it time?" she replied. "Why, don't you want to go away, Lenny?"

"Well, let's see if you think I will be able to!" he said.

So he unfolded his scheme, with more enthusiasm than he had displayed before Justin. His mother sat very still through it all. When he wound up with an eager, "Well, mamsy?" she told him,

"You make me very happy, dear."

"But you go ahead and arrange for your summer!" he cried. "Unless you want to stay on a little, and help."

"As your secretary?" she suggested.

"Bully!" he cried. "There'll be lots of letters to write to people who own vacant lots." He added with a laugh, "I guess you'll have to be something of a treasurer, too."

"Even if it should cost twice what you believe it will cost!" she declared.

He came around to her, and shook hands solemnly.

"You can accept your own resignation as secretary any time you want to quit to go away for the summer," he hastened to say, as he returned to his seat. "I don't intend to interfere any too much with your getting out of town. In fact, you're not to stay very long. It won't take me much time, though, to get the clubs off the paper and on real lots."

After the meal he won against the temptation to smoke, helped by his excitement, and settled himself in the library for a series of calculations dealing with the cost of baseball outfits. He was soon drafting, instead, a letter to the owners of vacant lots which he saw to be of prior importance.

Difficulty with a phrase sent him downstairs to his mother. He walked into the great parlor—and stopped abruptly. In conversation with her was a man for whom he had always entertained an aversion—one who, rumor had it, would have won Mrs. Craigie had not the Captain come on the scene.

Colonel Richard Henderson was a florid, handsome person, cordial, frank, and extremely wealthy; and he had never denied that he was still in love with the widow of

the brave naval officer. He got to his feet with an exclamation of pleasure when his eyes fell on Lenny.

"How he has grown!" he cried, shaking hands with him. And he remarked, "He is getting to resemble you more every day!"

"That's new to me," said Lenny. "I think I look very much like father."

It was intended to be full of meaning; but finding that his mother, instead of appearing guilty, only displayed greater affection toward him, Lenny felt ashamed of his trick.

"There was never a braver man!" said the Colonel. "It was a privilege to know him. And none knew him better than I!"

He went on in this vein, piling up incidents to show the fineness of the Captain. Almost reconciled to the visitor, Lenny was about to sit down to help entertain him, when the Colonel suggested:

"Come over to my place to-morrow, and we will have Tim and Prince out for a trot."

Like a flash, Lenny's distrust of the Colonel's motives in visiting them was again uppermost.

"Thank you," he said; "but I have laid out some work, which is going to occupy all my time to-morrow. Thank you, nevertheless."

His hauteur was somewhat forced, and left both his mother and the Colonel rather nonplussed.

"Oh, don't let me interfere with your plans!" said the latter, with the suspicion of a frown.

Mrs. Craigie told the Colonel, "You are to learn all about them speedily enough. Leonard intends that everybody shall—in proper time."

Lenny refused to warm out of his chilly manner, and,

excusing himself, slipped away. He made a bee-line for the dining-room, where Mrs. Mulholland was dozing over a magazine.

"How long has this been going on?" he said abruptly. He had not noticed that she was half-asleep.

Mrs. Mulholland gave a start, and looked up at the pale figure standing over her.

"W-what did you say?" she asked, trying to look wide-awake.

"How long *that*"—motioning toward the parlor—"has been going on," repeated Lenny.

"Goodness me, child, what are you talking about?" gasped Mrs. Mulholland.

"I wanted to know how often the Colonel has been coming here," was the reply.

"Oh!" And then Mrs. Mulholland, laying her magazine face downwards, regarded Lenny curiously. She asked, "Weren't you allowed to stay there?"

"What has that to do with it?" he demanded. "Don't answer questions by asking other ones!"

"Yes, I will! Is there anything your mother would keep from you that you ought to know?"

"Oh, isn't there?" snapped Lenny. "Then will you tell me why that man looks as if—as if——"

"As if—fiddlesticks!" Mrs. Mulholland broke in. "Old friends like your mother and Colonel Henderson don't have to apologize to you for talking to each other, young man!"

"That doesn't tell me how often he has been coming here lately!" Lenny insisted.

"Well, all *I* can say, Leonard Craigie, is that he don't come half often enough!" said Mrs. Mulholland. "Your mother should have more visitors."

"Well, she's got a big memory to keep her from being lonely!" he retorted. "Even *he* was praising father!"

"Was the Colonel praising him?" asked Mrs. Mulholland. It proved a slip on her part, for Lenny at once cried:

"Surprised, are you? Then you have reasons for being so! Oh, I'll get the correct facts from her! I'm no boy now!"

He was too wroth to listen to what he believed to be evasions, and got to his room in a perfect fury.

"Dad—dad loved her!" he cried, burying his head in his arms. Then he cried in a stifled voice, "Anybody could see that she was interested in the Colonel. Oh, his praise of dad wasn't honest! Not a bit! He was trying to make a good impression, and to stand in with me! If mother didn't see through that game, it was because she didn't want to!"

His suspicions continued to fill his mind until he was almost frantic.

"She'll always treat me like a kid," he complained bitterly. "Else why did she jump on my smoking, when I wasn't doing enough of it worth talking about? Just to keep me in my place!—a kid's place!"

When his mother passed the library on retiring, she was surprised to see Lenny huddled up in a chair sound asleep. As she advanced toward him, something caught her eye which made her pause abruptly in great amazement. Over Lenny's head she could see her husband's portrait—turned toward the wall! She gazed at it blankly. Some seconds passed, and the full significance of Lenny's act burst upon her. He had interpreted the Colonel's visit to mean that the latter was certain to become her husband.

In that moment she was not sure that in having allowed the Colonel to continue his visits she had not given Lenny just cause for grief. Nor could she shut her eyes to the reasons for the Colonel's visits.

"But," she insisted as she stood looking at the sleeping boy, "if I have tolerated his coming here it was because I believed he would prove a friend to Lenny—the sort Lenny will need in the future. No, I would never have agreed to marry him."

She went over to the portrait and turned it about again. Her eyes filled with tears as she looked at the thoughtful figure of the hero. Then she came back to Lenny and laid her hands on his shoulders. As she spoke his name he awoke with a start.

It took him some time to realize that he was at home and not at the academy. As he stood up he guiltily stole a glance in the direction of the portrait. The movement was almost involuntary. When he found that the portrait had been righted, he was covered with confusion; but instead of hanging his head, he stared straight ahead, past his mother.

"Lenny," she said, "this has been a terrible misunderstanding. And you could not have cared very much for me when you did that. You are sorry, are you not?"

Sullen, he waited for her to proceed, uncertain as to what she precisely meant by the word "misunderstanding."

A little pale, his mother exclaimed: "Do you know that you have insulted me?"

"No!" came in a high-pitched voice. "I'm sure I only did what I thought was right!" His voice broke. "You'd have done the same thing if you felt like me."

"You were sure that you had reason for feeling as you did, Lenny?" asked his mother.

"Oh, how could I have known different?" he cried.

"You never came to me to ask whether what you believed was really so. Then you no longer trust me, it appears," she said. When he made no answer, she began to leave the room.

In a moment his arms were about her, and he was saying:

"Oh, I did want to come to you! But I was so miserable! I couldn't make out why he visited here. And I grew so lonely. I know that I wasn't right when I turned the picture, but oh! how I was wrought up! I couldn't think!"

"If there was anything to tell you, Lenny, I would not keep it from you," said his mother, holding him tightly in her arms.

"Then I was all wrong?" he demanded eagerly.

She drew a long breath and told him: "All wrong."

He dared not ask: "And will we two always only belong to each other?" Instead he said: "I know why you let him come. You think his pull may help me. But we'll never need that help, mother. I don't believe in being pushed along. I'd rather start at the bottom and work up. Oh, I've got it in me! And I'm not boasting. A good many folks are going to be surprised before I'm ten years older. There won't always be a Bob Maur to rule me out. Before this summer is up I'll show them that it don't take an overgrown bully to do things!"

His manner was that of one who had been wronged. Evidently he was still smarting over his defeat for a place on the baseball team. Feeling that there was no conceit behind his words, only determination, his mother smiled cheerily at him.

"More important than all this just now is that you

and I, dear boy, should never do things blindly," she admonished him.

"No! no! It was a mistake! I was excited. You see, when I thought I might lose you, I lost hold of myself. There was another reason, too," he said.

They turned at the same moment and looked at the portrait of the hero of the Niagara.

Mrs. Craigie knew that the memory of her husband was "the other reason."

"As if I could ever forget!" she breathed.

Lenny's eyes glowed at the words.

CHAPTER V

LIVING under a constant strain, yet bravely concealing all signs of it, Gertrude Breen kept asking herself as she awaited the coming of Trevor:

"What if Justin was right? What if Trevor was only acting? What if he appears here only to create a scandal by throwing off his mask?"

She kept her fears from Justin; but he had no difficulty in guessing her unrest. While he was ready to cry "Confound Trevor!" he could not overlook the debt he owed that man. Had there been no Trevor, Gertrude might have refrained from expressing any preference among the men who sought her hand. Her youth would have frightened her out of any decision. As it was, Trevor had frightened her into one.

Justin did not prove as much of a help to Gertrude in her difficulty as he would have wished. Unexpected difficulties of his own had arisen, both in his law work and in the politics of his ward. He found that he was not going forward with any smoothness. Somehow it required more labor on his part to get things done than ever before. He believed he needed a rest, and he looked forward anxiously to getting away for several weeks during the summer.

All of this he kept from Gertrude, certain that there was no reason for worry. On one occasion, when he learned of the failure of a fellow attorney, and heard it attributed

to excessive cigarette smoking, he hesitated the next time he put his hand on his cigarette-case. Then he laughed the whole matter off.

"With my physique, any serious breakdown would be impossible!" he insisted.

Gertrude had only one topic of conversation when they were alone—how they were to manage with Robert Trevor. The latter had written to her that the "Robert" was to become "John." At the same time he had asked for advice concerning his behavior in the house—whether he could walk out after dusk; if he might not have his meals in his room, so as not to disturb her at the table; if he could address Conny by her first name;—and other matters which he considered of great importance.

Far from being delighted by this thoughtfulness, Gertrude was only made the more uncomfortable. If Trevor was not acting a part, and if he was really sincere, how long would she be able to keep the truth from coming out? Would not Conny so endear herself to him as to force him to reveal everything?

"When he comes he will be the real master of the situation, not I," she declared. Then she exclaimed: "Oh, I am a weak girl! I can no longer count on my pride. Perhaps I would not be so afraid of the consequences if I had made this place more of a home for Conny!"

She could not deny that this last self-accusation was an injustice to herself. Where other girls had used their incomes to chase wildly after social position and then to worry about a still higher footing in society, she had given all her attention to her home.

At the root of all the distress she felt lay the continual falsehoods to which she had to resort in preparing Conny for the arrival of her uncle. Conny showed agitation when

the eventful day approached, and she dismayed her aunt by asking:

"I'm not to talk to him about father, am I?"

"I think it would disturb your uncle very much if you did," was the answer. "You are no longer a child, dear; so I can trust you to be sensible. If you believe that every one concerned would be happier if you were not curious, don't you think you should not be?"

As if to prove to Conny that she trusted her, Gertrude did the daring thing of sending her to the station to meet her "uncle."

"They will have to see each other to-day, anyhow," Gertrude reasoned. "I will begin by showing that I place confidence in him. If he intends to make trouble, I can't keep him from it. Let him start right there and then. The sooner the better, if it must be!"

Her courage forsook her somewhat when the carriage disappeared from view with Conny. The latter could hardly keep her seat during the ride. People looked twice at the beribboned girl, and wondered at her visible excitement. She chanced upon Lenny, and called:

"See you later!"

"Not to-day! I'm too busy!" he shouted in return.

The station was alive with people beginning their exodus to the summer resorts. Among these Conny moved restlessly as she kept a lookout for the train which was to bring her "uncle." When they questioned her, she unhesitatingly told them for whom she was waiting. The result was a buzz of wonder among the various groups, who were well acquainted with her mother's elopement seventeen years before. They regretted that their train, now coming into sight, went out before the arrival of the one which was to bring Conny's relative.

When his finally pulled up at the station, there alighted a tall, slim man, tightly buttoned into a long coat which looked both new and hastily fitted. A brown soft hat, also new, covered a well-formed head, and from under the hat straggled black hair, plentifully besprinkled with gray. The face was lined, the eyes dark and capable of a great range of emotion. There was a slight stoop to the shoulders.

He looked about him with almost childish timidity. Conny knew instinctively that this was her uncle.

As she accosted him, he trembled.

"You're my Uncle John, aren't you?" she asked.

He was deathly white as he removed his hat with shaking fingers and bowed in a half-dignified, half-uncertain sort of way.

"Is—is this Constance?" he murmured.

She bowed in return with a gravity which would have made her aunt stare. Just as she was about to make a careless remark, she caught sight of two tears stealing down the tall man's cheeks. It left her speechless.

"Can we go?" hastily asked Trevor.

Still at a loss before the emotion he displayed, Connie humbly led the way to the carriage. He handed her in with a hand which shook. Once the carriage was under way, Conny was more at ease. Trevor, however, was tremulous with the emotion which surged through him.

"Did you ever look anything like my father?" was the first question put to him. Even as she said it, Conny was shamed by the thought of the disapproval it would have excited in her aunt.

Until she spoke, Trevor had stared straight ahead. Now he gathered himself together with a great effort, and draw-

ing a long breath, he turned his eyes upon her. Then he gasped:

"Why, you are the very picture of your mother!"

Conny, now somewhat more herself, asked: "Is that a compliment? Or do all actors carry on like that when they aren't acting? You'll teach me to act, won't you, uncle?"

"No!" came with startling sharpness. Trevor passed his hand over his forehead and said quickly: "I understand that I'm to live very quietly here. You see," he explained, "I am neither very strong, nor very young."

He dared not look at her again. When she laid a hand on his arm, he almost shrank away.

"Aren't there any lively old men?" she asked. "Don't you think I'll always be a gad-about? If you believe we'll have time to be solemn, you're mighty mistaken! Oh, to think you'll be able to tell me all about the stage! Why, it'll be better than a book!"

"The stage!" murmured Trevor. "Ah, child, I can understand what pleasure you might derive from talks about it—but," he said with finality in his tone, "we will *not* talk about it! I would rather, if you cared to spend an occasional hour with me, we used it in some other way."

He anxiously awaited her reply.

"Oh, we'll have lots of hours! And we'll get mighty chummy, too, never fear!" she cried. Then she risked, "You will tell me about father, too, won't you? I don't know a thing about him."

"Nothing?" came in a faltering voice. When she shook her head, he drew a long breath of relief. Immediately afterward he cried: "Better that you should not! He may have been admirable as an actor, but praise would have

to stop there. No, we will not talk about him, Constance!"

"Oh, how pretty that sounded!" she exclaimed, clapping her hands. "Con—stance! Why, it was beautiful!"

"And you, too, are beautiful! That name was just what your mother should have found for you," said Trevor softly.

When he lowered his voice it was hoarse and rather broken. When he raised it, it had both musical power and dramatic force.

Another disturbing question was put to him:

"Was father a better actor than you, uncle? Honor bright, now!"

Trevor smiled sadly as he said: "As good an actor, certainly." And he stole a glance at the small, radiant figure at his side, and then became filled with strange awe. Her prattle had kept him from feeling, in all its intensity, the wonder of seeing his child for the first time.

They were near the house now. Trevor's uneasiness was quite pronounced. At the same time he was not sure that he was not moving in some dream. When the carriage stopped, he glanced toward the great house without seeing it, and then handed Conny out almost mechanically.

"Go before me, me lord!" Conny got off in an august tone, which she had practiced for just that occasion.

She laughed merrily; but Trevor's form drooped as he ascended the steps of the porch where Gertrude stood scrutinizing both father and daughter. There was a formal exchange of greetings, and a little later Trevor was being shown to his room by the housekeeper, while Conny obeyed her aunt's imperative gesture to remain below.

The cool manner in which her uncle was received was a surprise to Conny. Gertrude had not intended to display

this lack of cordiality, but when she saw the gaunt figure of the man coming toward the house whose peace he had destroyed, she could not stifle her resentment. The memory of Marie and her sad fate had intruded to crush out for the moment Gertrude's natural kindliness.

She had a moment of apprehension while she waited for Conny to speak. Had Trevor begun to undermine the peace of the household?

"Isn't he a queer fellow?" said Conny. "Actors nowadays aren't like that! They don't look as if they had swapped clothes with somebody else by mistake the way uncle does. And as if they were going to sob right out in company!"

Gertrude breathed somewhat easier.

"I expect you to treat him with respect," she said. "He is not a young man."

"Oh, he's not a very old one," replied Conny. "And he'll look better when he gets a couple of good meals in him and gets rested up. I've heard lots about starved actors; but he looks as if he had starved for ages! I tried to liven him up a bit!"

Taken aback, Gertrude cried, "You must behave with dignity towards him! He will believe you were spoiled when he sees what manners you have!"

"I'll make him so jolly happy, he won't worry about my manners," Conny persisted.

"But he might want quiet," Gertrude argued. "You must not be thoughtless. Why should you be so irresponsible when I have to rely on your good sense? To find you but a child——"

Conny threw her arms about her to check the words, and Gertrude held her tightly to herself that it might ease the pain caused by the part she was playing. Then she

went to see that refreshments were sent up to the tired traveler. When she came back to Conny, Justin Mahan was awaiting her.

Aware that the arrival of Trevor must prove a trial for her, he had put aside his work, and had hastened to her, even though she had given no sign of her need of him. After their handshake, an exchange of glances between them sufficed. Justin said:

"Conny was telling me that she has made good friends with the old gentleman. He wouldn't be human if she didn't worm herself into his confidence—of course!"

"I tried to get him to talk about the theatre," said Conny. "Oh, if I ever cared to become an actress, wouldn't it be jolly to know all he could tell me?"

It fell with bomb-like effect upon Gertrude's ears.

"Nonsense!" she cried vehemently. "Never bring up that topic when you talk to him! If I find that you do, you will not be allowed to see him!"

Stunned by the outburst, Conny could only look to Justin to smooth matters over. He said:

"Gertrude, you can rely on Conny's good sense. I think she is willing right now to give us her word she won't do anything stupid!"

Conny promised to do so—"To the best of my ability!" She went on to explain, "I thought I'd talk about things which would interest him. As he had been an actor, didn't it seem right to ask him about the theatre? If you think he's going to be on your hands this summer, aunty, when we go away, you're mistaken! *I'll* take care of him! He needs sprucing up, and I'll make him look like a young 'un!"

And Conny took herself off, whistling.

"Now you see how much we are at Trevor's mercy!" cried Gertrude.

"Not yet," said Justin. "Not if we seek to develop a sense of responsibility in Conny in preparation for telling her the truth. She loves the very thought of her mother. And she has only a sort of curiosity about Trevor. You will be with her every day. The moment you see this curiosity become something stronger, be ready to tell her of the treatment her mother received. I intend to see Trevor to-day, and to gently hint that I am a lawyer. I wish I could tell him that you and I——" He broke off to look at her entreatingly.

"Not yet, Justin," she pleaded. "Not yet. Please!"

Here Conny came back from dismissing several boys who had dropped in on her.

"Say, Mr. Justin Mahan, do you know anything about Mr. Leonard Craigie?" she inquired solemnly.

"Isn't paying much attention to you lately, is he?" he replied.

"Oh, I wouldn't say that! He isn't paying *any* attention. When you meet him, he runs off shouting, 'I haven't any time to waste to-day!' And there you are! What's he up to? Or shall I find out from his mother?"

"Lenny is loaded with a big project which will use up a great deal of his time and gray matter, young lady," said Justin. "I would advise you not to scold him. It interferes with a man's usefulness."

Conny eyed him mockingly. "As if Lenny was going to be particularly useful just because he was in a hurry!" she retorted.

"Oh, but he is!" said Justin, serious now. "He is going to get together all the boys in Germantown who want to play ball, and who haven't a place to play it, nor the nec-

essary gloves, masks, nor suits to make them look like ball players. In other words, our Lenny is branching out as a philanthropist, although he'd cut you dead if you told him so. All this is between ourselves! You're not to blab what you've heard, mind you!"

Aglow with enthusiasm, Conny gave vent to several cheers. Before she could interpose a word, Justin had started off in praise of baseball.

"I am half-sorry that when I left college I refused an offer of doing professional ball in summer," he said. "The men going into the game to-day are not of the 'tough' variety; and the college man could raise the social status of the game. I'd jump at the chance of investing in a baseball club, and of helping this great outdoor game. Baseball is going to take the American people more into the open, with a corresponding increase of health."

"And Lenny got his notion all out of his own head?" asked Conny.

"So it seems. I guess he isn't thinking of any vacation. It will be his making, though," commented Justin. "When a boy gets a grip on himself like that, he don't fall by the wayside, as a rule, later in life. Now everybody about here thinks that Bob Maur is going to bring honor to the community. I trust Lenny to make a better showing—certainly a cleaner one. Which shows I dislike Maur—and I am not going to apologize for it."

Here Conny ventured on a defence, without, however, drawing Justin into an argument. He had no wish to disturb her friendships. When Conny said that she wished to go up and see her uncle, Justin interposed:

"I was about to do it myself," he said. "I think he wants to talk to a man for a little while. It would be like

a man to do so, after a tiresome journey, during which he most likely kept very quiet."

"Dollars to doughnuts you talk about the theatre!" exclaimed Conny.

"Certainly—if he won't talk about anything else," Justin replied.

Gertrude followed him to the foot of the stairs, and thanked him for what he was about to do.

"I haven't yet," he told her. "I am on a journey of discovery. If he holds out a chance of peace, I'll promptly make peace!"

"For Conny's sake!" said Gertrude. "As for me—well, his presence will always be too terrible a reminder of the past."

Justin was grave when he knocked upon Trevor's door. The actor received him with a sort of confused dignity. Justin introduced himself as a "close friend to Miss Breen—a very close friend, who has the interest of both Conny and Miss Breen at heart, and who knows of your relationship to Conny."

He studied the drooping figure as he spoke; and before he had finished introducing himself, he had decided that he would not frighten Trevor by revealing the fact that he was a lawyer. In the passage of those few moments, Justin saw why Gertrude had been influenced to allow Trevor to come from Chicago. Nothing of guile could be concealed behind the actor's candid exterior, not even if he was the most consummate actor in the world. Only great suffering was apparent in the visage and bearing of the sad, quiet personage.

Justin exclaimed mentally, "The issue will be peace!"

He extended his cigarette-case to the nervous man. The actor courteously thanked him, but refused.

"I broke myself of smoking," he hastened to explain apologetically, "when I found how it was increasing the nervousness which finally drove me from the stage. Will you kindly be seated? I wish indeed to talk to you if you are in the confidence of Miss Breen. I want to have myself understood, particularly as I have found Miss Breen an unusual woman for her years, and since much of my destiny will depend upon her good will."

"Conny's aunt has, among other qualities, a fine sense of justice," Justin remarked. "She may sometimes be at a loss how to face a trying situation, but she will act thoughtfully and justly. Depend upon it, she will in the end become your ally in your difficulties."

For a time Trevor stood motionless, buried in thought. Then his lips murmured in gratitude, "Thank God!"

He dropped into a chair with a sigh, only to rear his gaunt form into the air, and to stagger about the room as if the inner tension was too much for him.

Coming back to his seat with a sudden air of determination, he drew his chair close to Justin's, and said:

"I do not know whether you will have patience for what I want to relate to you. I have not dared to tell it to Miss Breen as I wished. But it weighs down my conscience with a crushing burden—and I must speak. You, sir, appear a worthy man. Hear me out. It will certainly not better your opinion of me! But the relief I will perhaps find will take some measure of weight from my soul!"

Justin felt that he dared not interfere; rather that he must respect the crying need of the wretched man to be heard. Trevor took a long breath—like one who is about to undertake some trying task. Then he began, in a pensive voice, which soon took on a tone of half-terror. The

words came in a torrent, at times musical, at times hoarse, but finally bitter with self-accusation.

"I was playing Shakespearean rôles at a theatre in Philadelphia when Marie first saw me," he recounted. "Eighteen years ago I was a somewhat more prepossessing individual, sir! I was not this miserable, useless wreck. Mad women worshiped me. Although spells of illness already presaged the end of my acting and the setting of my sun, I felt confident, strong!

"Marie came along. She secured an introduction to me —and praise from her sounded sweet to ears which you would suppose weary of praise! Ah, what a glorious being she was! Her child-like beauty fascinated me. More than that, I believed she had talent for acting. The moneyed family she represented was of no interest to me. We hastily married. Ah, how renewed my art became! How wonderfully I played!

"But folly broke in upon our happiness. I struck at the glory of Marie's love for me by insisting that she should act, that she should give herself heart and soul to a career of which she had never dreamed! It was one thing for her to watch with delight another's work on the stage; it was a totally different thing for her to don a costume and play a part. She was revolted, terrified.

"Was it folly for me to insist? It was madness! The wildest act of a madman! But I was equally wild about my art; and when I saw ability within reach, I sought to press it into service. I was seeking to build up a following among playgoers—a following which would insure my success, and bring me favorably to the notice of the big managers. You see, I had not been snapped up by these men, because the tide had set in the direction of poor plays.

"And I sought to make Marie's beauty and high intelligence serve me. At first she faced me with tearful rebellion. Then she stood stoutly upon her rights. Storm followed storm. In my ambition I threw all sense of duty to her overboard. At last I stood defeated: she would not act. But although I gave up the effort to force her to do so, we had both of us gone too far for peace.

"Ah, would that I had died before Marie met me!—I who was to bring her woe! She deserved better of life, she who had begun with health and youth and beauty! Better of life than a turbulent spirit for a husband! Better of life than death! Surely!"

The tears streamed down the seamed face. Trevor sat very still, his head bowed, his thin fingers locked with crushing force. Fighting back his grief, he went on:

"It is a late day for atonement, you will say! Believe me, I have paid dearly for it all. After I realized that she had gone, the world seemed empty. Illness came on. With the applause of audiences no longer in my ears, I had leisure for contemplation. During many a sleepless night did I scourge my soul! Every brutal word I used to that sweet young girl was to return to torture me a thousandfold! Only one thing kept me from crawling into a suicide's grave—the possibility that there had been a child born to me. Yet I dared not ask until a little while ago; and then only after a sudden fear one night that I was soon to die. Punishment? Yes, I have been punished! But I am deserving of more! I dare not entirely believe that I am near the child who is my daughter. It would be too much after the years of loneliness! Is the long period of torture to end? It would seem impossible!"

After an interval of silence, Trevor added:

"Miss Breen has put me so much in her debt that I

am at a loss how to meet her generosity. Had she acted with harshness, I might have been more at ease. I did not expect to find my daughter within reach for the asking. Let Miss Breen have no fear for the future. Before I have been many hours with Constance, she will know that her father was—unspeakable! That also is part of my atonement!"

Justin, hardened though he had somewhat become to the punishment meted out in court-rooms for wrongdoing, was deeply stirred, both by the simple sincerity of the man before him, and the anguish he had revealed.

"Leave all to time, that cure for all our wounds!" he said quietly to the suffering man. "If I can be of service to you, command me."

From below rang out Conny's laughter, breaking in on the quiet about the house.

"Do you hear that!" cried Trevor, lifting his head. "That is life to me! Oh, do not blame me for loving her! She is all I have in the world!"

CHAPTER VI

THOSE of Lenny's boy acquaintances who did not get away early for the summer marveled at the sudden manner in which he sprang into local fame. His baseball project became the absorbing topic with every young lover of the game in Germantown. Prior to calling together the leading spirits among the boys that were to make up the clubs, he interviewed owners of vacant lots. The favorable manner in which his intended work was received by them surpassed his most sanguine hopes. Several of the men asked to be remembered when there would be a call for contributions.

Then came the meeting of the recognized leaders of the boys. These assembled at Lenny's home, and he outlined his plans in full. The conference was shy at first, and somewhat disinclined to offer suggestions; but Lenny impressed upon it that the success of the baseball league lay in its hands, rather than in his.

"You fellows will have to run this, not I," he said. "The sooner you all jump in and have your say, the quicker will we get life into the league."

It was not long before suggestions came plentifully, and differences just as frequently. The spirit which ruled the boys was, however, fairer than Lenny had expected. He was astonished at the ability of some to reason beyond their years. When the meeting adjourned after electing officers

and appointing a time for arranging the games, he fairly danced for joy.

"Don't they look like dandy material!" he cried to his mother. "Oh, they mayn't have seemed so to you! But I can tell a lively lot of fellows when I get my eyes on them. And some of them have a reputation for great baseball."

"I was most interested in the little fellows," said Mrs. Craigie, who had watched them file into the house.

"So was I! Those junior clubs aren't going to be dull! And they'll graduate grown-up material in a few years! That's what will keep the league going. As for the older chaps—why, they'll be getting into big professional company, and give the league a national reputation. I was glad to have a rule passed about worrying the umpire. Any fellow who does a lot of that gets expelled. That was the only motion I worked for."

"And the name of the league?" asked his mother.

"They wanted to call it the Captain Craigie Baseball Association, but I wouldn't have it. It would look as if they were thankful to me, although that wasn't the reason why they picked out the name. I didn't want everybody to think I chose it for them," Lenny explained.

"You told them about your father?" asked his mother with a wan smile.

"Yes. It came out when they were speaking about a catcher who broke his thumb, but kept right on playing. So I told them a pretty brave story I had heard! They took it all right, too!"

"I shouldn't wonder!" said his mother.

"You would have laughed at the airs the kids put on when we got to speaking about their schedule! You see, we've arranged everything according to age. We've got nine vacant lots now, and some of them hold more than

one diamond. But I'm not satisfied yet. Every kid in Germantown over ten will get a chance to play ball, if hustling will do anything!"

"You think you will get along with the boys?" Mrs. Craigie queried.

"I think so. And it won't be because I did anything for them! No favoritism! I saw too much of it at the academy. I'm not going to interfere!—not in the slightest! Every one is to have the same say. The only reason my ideas were taken up was because I worked them out pretty carefully beforehand; that was why."

To his mother, the importance of Lenny's interest in the league lay in its effect upon him. In the few days of its organization his manner had become more manly. He talked with an air of considerable thoughtfulness. But still more important was his lessened restlessness. When he spent an evening at home, he would sit quietly and plan, either with pencil and paper before him, or by discussing details with his mother.

Among his suggestions had been one for rewarding those boys who played two years in the league. They were to come into complete possession of the gloves and baseball shoes they used, and this applied equally to the catchers' masks. The gifts would not be trifling, for the best sort of baseball equipment was to be supplied to the league.

When his mother spoke of paying out of her own purse for a considerable number of baseball suits, Lenny argued that it would be better to promise them for the future, so as to stimulate interest. He decided that the clubs which won the championships in their respective classes should be presented with these suits as prizes.

"I am going to try to win one of those suits for myself!" he declared. "I'm going to play the genuine article of

baseball this summer on one of the teams. But you may be sure, mother, that if any man shows up better for the position I am trying for than I, he gets the place, not yours truly! No Bob Maur business in the Germantown League of Baseball Clubs."

At the same time, he urged his mother to get ready to go away for the summer.

"There is time, dear," she said. "I want to see the league at work before I go. It won't be hard to stay here, for Gertrude Breen told me that she does not intend to leave for the entire summer. She will run down to the shore occasionally instead."

Lenny had no chance to wonder at this. His own affairs occupied almost all his waking moments. His mother, however, had seen some connection between the arrival of Conny's uncle and the uneasy air Gertrude wore, and sought to be of help to her. She guessed that Justin Mahan was trying to do the very same thing. It was not like Mrs. Craigie, though, to ask questions.

From Gertrude she learned that Conny spent almost all her spare time with her uncle. It appeared that Lenny also showed a fondness for the actor. On one of his rare visits he smoked a cigarette in that man's presence, and was promptly rebuked by Conny, who had set herself up as guardian of her uncle.

"You boys are funny!" she cried. "You roll up a silly plant, and light it, and then fill yourself with its smoke! If only the men didn't do such a silly thing, you boys might quit!"

"I won't smoke here if you think your uncle isn't fond of it," replied Lenny. "At the same time, you needn't turn up your nose about it! Why can Justin Mahan be puffing away at cigarettes all day?"

"Oh, I don't care so much about *him!*" replied Conny with an arch smile which killed all of Lenny's resentment at a stroke.

"Suppose you come to the opening game of the league and throw the ball out to the umpire," he said.

"Is that an honor?" she asked carelessly.

"Now pretend you don't know that it is!" he cried.

"An honor for me or the league?" she queried, with her head now aslant.

"Since you're asking—why, for you!" he replied, smiling maliciously. "If you hadn't asked, it might have been an honor for the league. You might as well know, though, that the boys will play like the very dickens with you looking on!"

Then he went on to explain that on the opening day, only two clubs—and these were of the class represented by the oldest boys—would start the season, with all the other boys looking on. The two clubs would be drawn by lot, so as not to arouse any ill-feeling among the others. After the opening day, all the vacant lots would be occupied, and the league would settle down to its season of play according to a regular schedule.

"Oh, I couldn't throw the ball!" suddenly cried Conny. "Not with such a lot of people looking on! But I'll come to see the games, and bring uncle, if the boys won't say things about him."

Lenny's eyes flashed. "If they did," he told her, "there wouldn't be enough of the league left to write about on your thumb-nail! You bring your uncle; and if he won't be cheering at the end of the first inning—well, you'll have to bring him another time!" Lenny unexpectedly finished with a smile. "He's got a few cheers in him, I bet. It won't be any Romeo and Juliet performance, though, and

the boys might be impolite to the umpire, you know. But you'll pretend not to hear, won't you?"

Here Conny whispered, "You ought to see the newspaper notices I made uncle show me about father's acting! They couldn't say enough about him! Every one of them, too!" Then she held up a warning finger. "Just between us, you know, Lenny! Aunt would never forgive me if she thought I gabbed!"

There were many things similar to this, told "just between us," of which Conny never breathed a word to the other boys. One incident, however, was withheld from Lenny. It had to do with Maur, and occurred prior to his departure to the mountains for the summer.

Bob Maur had freely expressed his disgust that Conny should remain in Germantown because of what he termed her aunt's "whim." On parting, as he held Conny's hand, he hastily glanced about him, and then asked for a kiss. The deadly silence which followed drove him to excuses; then he made a confession which left Conny panic-stricken.

"Why, Bob," she gasped, "we're only kids! You must be joking! In love with me! You don't mean it! I'm a child yet! Don't you see? Oh, you surely must be joking! You are!"

She had stepped away from him in alarm. He never faltered. Instead, he said:

"Oh, no, I'm not! I'm perfectly serious about it! And I want you to be so, too! If you wish, I'll not speak of it soon again. But if I drop it, that won't mean I'll keep mum about it very long. I care too much for you to just mention it, and then forget it. That's not like me!"

Conny insisted on viewing his proposal in an amusing light. When alone, however, she did not dismiss it lightly. No matter how much she tried to put it out of her thoughts,

it continued to worry her. She was soon at her wits' end; and to make matters worse, she found herself unable to speak of it to any one, for fear that what was serious to her would only prove amusing to another. For the first time in her life she was likely to make a secret of a thing about which she needed advice.

The more she considered it, the more she felt that unless she could get it off her mind by a talk with some one, it would continue to give her no peace. From the first, her uncle seemed the most likely person to whom to go; but in his case she was as much afraid of the solemn way in which he would treat it as of the amusement it might arouse in any other person.

Justin might have served; only he would be likely to send her to Gertrude. And, again, she felt that if he laughed at her, she might never forgive him. So in the end, she went to her uncle, and related the whole thing, in one breath, with pleas for secrecy, advice, help and understanding. She was not prepared for her uncle's dismay at the recital of her first proposal of marriage.

"No! No! No, Constance!" he cried, seizing her wildly by the arm. "No! Do not listen to such things! Do not let them fill your mind—even for an instant! Not at this time of your life! Oh, do not be hasty! A world of grief can follow the impulse of a moment! And you are but a child!"

As Conny smiled at him, he exclaimed:

"What joy you have given me in thus coming to me! It is heaven's own kindness that you did this! I feel immeasurably rich!"

With these words he lifted his head joyously. A moment later, the unforgettable years had swept down upon him, to point out his arrogance in asking for happiness. He

bowed his head humbly. When he saw with what tender curiosity Conny was watching him, he hastened to say:

"Always come to me! Oh, I must have you do that! True, your aunt has been very kind to me. These rooms are spacious. The view from those windows is beautiful. I can dream and contemplate. I can read aloud and yet disturb no one. But all this only leaves a great void within my soul. Your—your laughter, your lightness of spirit buoys me up. Bring me these, if nothing else!"

Here Conny put a question which wiped out all the eagerness in his manner.

"Why do you look so down-hearted when I mention father's name?" she asked. "Do you really feel so set against him?"

"Yes! Because my love of justice in his case is greater than any kindliness I might discover towards him," was the reply, spoken rather sadly.

"But *I* have forgiven him!" cried Conny.

"Ah, because you know nothing!" cried Trevor, turning away, so as not to have to face her. "And forgiveness does not lie with you. It lies with the dead."

Conny objected to "being given the 'creeps,'" as she put it. She forced her uncle out of his sadness by demanding some story which would have laughter in it. He had but to turn to his store of amusing incidents behind the scenes to bring this laughter. But as the voice of Gertrude sounded suddenly in the stillness of the garden behind the house, the smile crept away from his lips. He thrust himself back in his chair, shame-faced and silent.

Into the rooms which Robert Trevor occupied Gertrude never came; and he never dined below. They mutually sought to keep out of each other's way. Although by not seeing him often, Gertrude could not learn the real nature

of the man, she felt at the same time that she might be saving herself from any unpleasantness contact might bring. What the upshot of Conny's fondness for him would be she dared not contemplate. For her there was the memory, often revived, of her sister's return home, half-dead with terror and grief.

"But," Justin insisted, "if you met Trevor, and if you gave him a few minutes now and then, you would see him in a different light. He feels most keenly the suffering he brought Marie. In fact, he persists in perpetually punishing himself by brooding over it. Conny is not going to have a wholesome respect for her father—the father that Trevor *was*. It is safe to leave matters in the hands of destiny; but incidentally don't you think it would be well to make destiny wear a smile?"

"Not yet," Gertrude said. "Not yet. I must get accustomed to his presence here. When Conny grows older and less irresponsible, perhaps I shall not find it so hard to think of her knowing the truth, and of her liking this man. Oh, Justin, am I a coward?"

He shook his head; then added, "I am not seeking to flatter you. The situation happens to be a tough one. But you must have patience; you must be prepared for anything—and you must learn to smile."

As he reached out for her hand, she unconsciously gave it to him. Then she hastily withdrew it.

"Soon," he firmly declared, "I will have *my* needs considered, too! Yes, Gertrude, I have reached a point where a word from you would mean a big lease of life. Since you know your own restlessness because of your indecision concerning Trevor, it should be easy for you to see how restless I am because you have not made up your mind about

me. Oh, you see it! Yet have I not put up a good fight in not demanding a speedy answer from you?"

"But—but your fight has not been very long," she reminded him.

"What has time to do with it? Your concern about Trevor has not been very long! Of course, if I believed for one moment that you did not care for me, that would be the end of my visits here! The strain is becoming unbearable."

"If I asked you to wait until next winter for my decision, would the strain really be too great for you?" she asked, turning away so as not to see the appeal in his eyes. She immediately faced him again, to cry, "Oh, I am not trifling! I am not holding you off for flimsy reasons! Surely you believe me, Justin!"

"Since I respect you—yes," he replied. "Only I believe we would both be happier if you made up your mind right away."

"There will be time to think of my own needs when I am not so anxious about Conny, and when I am somewhat calmer." She asked, "Will you not get away to the shore to-morrow? Do not think of me! You need a rest from that office work. You are not looking too well."

"I not well?" he laughed. "That would be strange! I do feel tired. But trust to luck to bring me some refreshing excitement! You know, I am to umpire the first game of the Germantown League of Baseball Clubs to-morrow. A serious affair and full of honor! Surely you have been invited! Young Craigie will never forgive you if you do not grace the occasion!"

"Yes, Mrs. Craigie spoke of my coming, but I did not promise—because I did not know you were going to umpire." And Gertrude asked, "Have you considered what

those boys might say to you if your decisions did not happen to suit them?"

Justin laughed. Then he hastened to reassure her.

"I don't think Lenny would tolerate that," he said; "so it will most likely be conspicuous by its absence. He must have thought about it, since his mother is to be there. He is a very likeable chap. There hasn't been the least pose about the way he has managed this baseball business. In fact, he is actually trying to avoid having a noise made about his connection with it. It isn't likely that the boys for whom he is doing this thing will forget. When they grow up into citizens, if he ever needs them, he will have them with him. That is the only sort of a following to have—one that has grown up with you. I wouldn't have been forced to truckle to political bosses if that had been the case."

"You surely are not going to grieve about that now!" Gertrude protested. "It would be as reasonable as to believe that Leonard Craigie can be thinking of politics in helping those boys. *That* would be as bad as the remark Miss Sutton let fall when she was here yesterday about Mrs. Craigie staying in town because Colonel Henderson has not left it."

"Miss Sutton should have lived in a time when people were tarred and feathered for gossip like that!" said Justin in disgust. "How did you get back at her? I know you would want to do it politely. Oh, there is no fun in being a woman!"

"Well," said Gertrude, "I inquired very gently whether the thought hadn't struck Miss Sutton that things might be just the other way—that the Colonel might be staying because Mrs. Craigie had not gone away. Then I added, 'The beauty of Mrs. Craigie's friendship is that it always

selects fine persons to whom to devote itself'; for everyone knows that Mrs. Craigie never cared for Miss Sutton. That was the way I got back at her. Could a man have done better? I never knew I could be so cruel; but I was urged on by indignation—righteous indignation!"

At this moment Conny entered the room with her arms full of flowers. Coming up to Justin, she thrust her bouquet at him. As the odor of the flowers filled his nostrils, he became dizzy, and had a feeling of suffocation.

"How white you are!" cried Gertrude, hurrying over to him.

Conny had stepped back when his hand roughly thrust the flowers aside. She gazed at his pallid features with amazement.

"I never could stand wild flowers," he said; and was immediately ashamed of the falsehood. "Strange, is it not, that they should have such an effect upon me!"

Some inkling of the reason for this cropped out when he and Gertrude took dinner at Mrs. Craigie's home that evening. Lenny was not present. He was eating his meal in the company of Trevor and Conny, at the latter's invitation.

This change-about was not discussed at his mother's table. Mrs. Craigie carefully avoided any talk about Trevor. The conversation that evening dealt with sport, greatly to Justin's delight. He did not agree with Mrs. Craigie when she spoke of the bad influence the boys of the league might have on Lenny.

"You must know that boys of his own station can go just as far when it comes to knavery, meanness and wrong," he said. "As for Lenny, I have an idea he can be relied upon to take care of himself—always! I have seen how he managed with those boys. At the same time, you

must consider that his efforts in their behalf will do much to give him self-reliance."

Without denying this, Mrs. Craigie hastened to point out:

"Those boys smoke—a great deal. And I believe Lenny indulges in that habit occasionally. Even if he does not do it to any extent, it is cause for worry."

"If he does only indulge occasionally," said Justin, "what have you to fear? He is almost full-grown. And I am sure he has no other vices—if we may call it a vice!"

"I am afraid of the cigarette habit," replied Mrs. Craigie. "A physician's letter to a newspaper the other day pointed out how frequently a sensitive, nervous organization will go to pieces under its influence. Think how high-strung most boys are! He recounted how a patient of his who was an inveterate smoker would collapse when given a whiff of a strong perfume. Is that not enough proof of the effect of tobacco? But what this physician said was no news to me!"

She grew silent, and was unaware of the uneasiness her words had created in Justin's mind.

"It all depends upon the individual," he finally hazarded in his own defence.

"But consider, Mr. Mahan, what the constant breathing of tobacco fumes in place of fresh air must do to even the most robust constitution!" said Mrs. Craigie. "There must be some reason for the stringent rules about smoking athletes have to follow."

"There are individuals who are left nervous wrecks by going to concerts," Justin argued with a smile. "The world is made up of all sorts of people. In Lenny's case, if he lives out in the open enough, an occasional cigarette won't harm him. Anyway, remember that too much pres-

sure about his smoking might magnify his need of tobacco."

Then Justin spoke of something else, displeased by the grave manner in which Gertrude had followed the talk. He wondered if it would be in place for him to take Lenny to task about his cigarettes.

"Hardly!" he reflected. "Not when I indulge myself in them as much as I do! Lenny won't overdo it.

That boy was overdoing it, but his open-air life helped to counteract its effects. He did not, however, escape scot free. Without his being aware of the fact, the unusually long stretches of sleep he needed were the result of his apparently mild indulgence. But since no unpleasant symptoms showed themselves, he grew quite sceptical about the ills for which tobacco was blamed.

There was little time for him to think of himself; the baseball clubs demanded all his attention. His success with these made his name known in almost every household in Germantown which possessed a boy. He had gone so far as to secure prominent people to umpire the games. In addition, professional and business men rallied to his support with a heartiness which assured the financial success of the undertaking.

He found an occasional chance, however, to steal off for a visit to Conny and her uncle. Of the few boys who still remained in Germantown, none had so warm a place in Trevor's affection as Lenny. Two of the boy visitors had been summarily dismissed by Conny when she caught them winking at each other while her uncle recited "Eugene Aram's Dream," although they lied frantically in denial of the winking.

Lenny's interest in the actor was genuine. Under the stimulus of his and Conny's presence, Trevor would often

repeat whole scenes from plays which he had given to the public. He would forget his physical weakness, and would storm up and down the room, while his auditors sat spell-bound. Or he would enthusiastically describe some first-night, and the numberless rehearsals which had ushered it in.

He was careful, nevertheless, to warn his young hearers against the terrible price too often paid for success on the stage. The fickleness of audiences and of critics, the terrible rivalry in the theatrical profession itself, and the fearful amount of work involved to get small returns, were spread before them, until they saw the stage in its naked reality.

"Oh, I guess there's lots of work in 'most everything one tries one's hand at!" Lenny philosophized. "As for what people say—the critics, you know—why, there are lots of fellows I chummed with who grinned hard when they heard what I was going to do for the boys of Germantown. It's human nature."

Later Lenny again complained of the attitude of the boys in his own circle towards the league.

"I'm glad Jordan and Cuthbertson and Phil Stanley have gone at last," he told Conny. "They kept asking me fool questions about the clubs, in order to make the whole thing look ridiculous!"

"Why, you silly boy!" cried Conny. "They didn't feel like that at all! You're dreaming!"

"Can't people do mean things, even though you do like them?" retorted Lenny.

"Just because I don't know whether that's a compliment or not, you're to walk around the porch on your hands in plain sight of everybody!" he was ordered.

He only looked at her gravely. When she repeated her command, he began:

"A man——"

But she began to laugh, and held her sides as if the joke she saw was too much for her.

She was more serious in a moment as she told how she had coaxed her uncle to take drives with her, instead of indulging in early morning walks.

"And at such hours!" she cried. "There can't be a soul up—except footpads. I keep worrying about them, but he is sure no one would want to hurt him. I spoke to auntie about it. 'Why should I interfere with what gives him pleasure?' she said. Do you know, he seems to be hiding himself from people!"

"Why haven't you asked him to quit it, for your sake?" asked Lenny, much concerned.

"I did. But he got so quiet, I was frightened! I used to think I understood folks. I'm not so sure now that I do. Even you are queer—with nothing but your notions about the league and what it is going to do!"

"Oh, but look at the attendance we are getting, and what the papers are saying about us!" cried Lenny jubilantly. "It isn't for one year. It's going to have its effect on the whole present generation of Germantown boys! And it's nothing alongside of what I'm planning for next year!"

"Way down in your heart, how do you feel about it?" asked Conny. "Your inside idea, mind you! Is it doing you any good?"

"Well, I'm really useful for the first time in my life. I'm not merely a fellow who gets three square meals a day, and pocket-money, and is stuffing himself with an education which may be no good to anybody! To tell the truth, I feel grown up!"

He said it quietly, earnestly. As Conny looked into his thoughtful face, she felt that something of the old playmate she had known was gone, never to return. It was undeniable that he was no longer altogether a boy. A subtle sadness stole over Conny for a moment, a feeling quite new to her. Then she laughed.

In answer to Lenny's look of inquiry, she said:

"Oh, I was mooning, and caught myself at it. I was afraid we couldn't be kids again—never! But there can be grown-up kids, can't there? Come, let's slip away for a long tramp! Let's get lost for the rest of the day!"

"Great guns, I've loafed too long as it is!" cried Lenny, springing to his feet. "Simes, the clothier, has promised me a contribution for the league. I'm going to collect it. So long!"

And he was off, with long strides, his hands in his pockets.

"No," said Conny sadly, shaking her head, "kid days are over."

CHAPTER VII

THE baseball league drew crowds which taxed the capacity of the various lots. Before the end of summer the games attracted people from the neighboring sections of Philadelphia. During the contests of the various clubs for the championships of their respective classes, so much bitterness was shown, that Lenny had to use considerable tact to keep the different elements at peace.

A system of double umpiring—one behind the plate and one for the bases—was found necessary. Even then only the fear of expulsion for umpire-baiting averted serious trouble. On the other hand, as if to balance the ill-feeling which resulted from the keen struggle, there was a readiness to help along the work of the league, and to build up its reputation.

"Baseball," said Justin after a trying day as an umpire, "simply typifies the American spirit. Those scraps were typically American. What other nation would take its play so seriously?"

"Wouldn't you rather they hadn't called you a 'chump'?" asked Lenny, not happy over the incident.

"I remember what *I* once called an umpire, and it makes my ears tingle to think of it!" was the reply. "So how can I blame these fellows, who haven't the pretensions of a college-bred man?"

When Lenny spoke of his fear that Justin's experience

as an umpire might drive him from the league grounds, the older man said with a laugh:

"If you knew the fun I get out of the job, you wouldn't worry about me. And you may as well know that I cut short what vacation I took so as to get back behind the plate."

It was not because of Gertrude that Justin stayed in town, for there was an entire month during which she had gone to some friends at Long Branch. Conny had been taken along, and in that short time Gertrude discovered how attached the young girl was to Trevor. It was somewhat of a shock for her to hear Conny say:

"I can't have any fun while poor uncle is alone in that big house!"

"But he hadn't the slightest desire to go anywhere for the summer," Gertrude replied.

"Perhaps we didn't coax him hard enough," said Conny.

"Your uncle knows his own mind. Anyhow, there is Leonard Craigie to run in and see him often," Gertrude reminded her.

"Oh, there's nothing in the wide world for Lenny but baseball!" came in a petulant voice.

So some of his boy acquaintances thought when they drifted back into town at the end of summer. Lenny appeared in a more favorable light to them, although a few agreed with Maur when he claimed that all Lenny sought was newspaper notice.

"Why should he want to bother with a bunch of fellows like that?" Maur argued.

He came to look on at the final games with a superior air, not at all happy over the attention which Lenny received. On catching a remark of dissatisfaction from a boy who sat near him—one who had been expelled from

the league, and who had never made his peace with it—Maur was tempted to begin the formation of opposition clubs. But he saw at a glance that this would arouse unfavorable comment, and that his motives would be questioned.

"Oh, the league will fall apart and split up in a year or two, anyhow!" he claimed. "Craigie isn't ingenious enough to think up new ways of keeping the boys interested."

And he laid a bet with himself that the baseball association would not survive another season.

"Trying to make friends of boys of that sort!" Maur mused with a grin.

However, despite all his hopes that the battles for the various championships would precipitate trouble, the games as a whole went along smoothly. Finally the day arrived when these championships were decided, and prizes were to be presented to the members of the winning clubs. Most noticeable were the baseball suits, which were piled up in considerable number in front of the diamond, all carefully boxed. These were somewhat larger than the boys to whom they were to go, in order to allow for the bodily growth which the time until the following season would bring.

The eventful day began with a baseball game between the champion team representing the oldest boys of the league and an out-of-town club. The contest was handily won by the home team, amid great rejoicing. By this time the carriages and automobiles of well-known people, including professional and business men, politicians, and persons of social prominence, formed a conspicuous part of the attendance. Conny was there with a bevy of girl friends. Mrs. Craigie was surrounded by a host of neighbors who had

come out of curiosity, and who finished by being as enthusiastic as she. Gertrude had appeared on the scene somewhat early, in order to witness Justin's umpiring of the game.

A sudden silence fell upon the crowd when a Councilman stepped forward. After a lengthy speech, during which Lenny's name was frequently mentioned, much to the discomfort of that boy, the Councilman presented to him the captains of the various winning teams for the prizes. It developed that there were not only suits, but small medals and flowers. Then the captains of the teams which had been second best in the contests were called forward, and the members of their clubs were surprised and made happy by orders on a Philadelphia sporting goods establishment for baseball shoes. To bring a full measure of joy to the teams, a Germantown merchant contributed fine caps to the entire league.

Lenny was much embarrassed when he addressed the players. After complimenting the winning clubs, he spoke at considerable length of those in the league who had made good records, and pointed out some of the pitching feats, and examples of excellent fielding and base-running. He ended by saying:

"I hope this section will get to be famous all over the country for the great players it will contribute to American baseball. I feel sure it will after some of the work done on the lots which were loaned to us. I hope there will always be property owners who will let ball teams have grounds for the asking. Baseball is the great American game. Good Americans ought to encourage it. And now, good-by to the game until next spring!"

The occasion was not to end there, for one of the players came forward with a small loving cup, bought by contribu-

tions from all the teams, and he presented this to Lenny with the words:

"The Germantown League of Baseball Clubs thanks you for your efforts in its behalf. Please accept this with our warmest regards and esteem."

Justin, who was standing nearby, cried, "Three cheers for Lenny Craigie!"

They were given with a will. Then the clubs marched in a body to Mrs. Craigie's lawn, where there was a "spread," more speeches, and great enthusiasm for the prospects of the next baseball season.

When the boys had gone, Lenny exclaimed:

"I wouldn't have missed this summer for anything in the world! It's been as good as an education. I feel as if now I really was part of Germantown!"

That evening at dinner, to which Justin and several other men had been invited, Lenny outlined his plans for the following summer. These included a series of games at the end of the following season, to which an admission fee would be charged, the proceeds to go to the erection of a club-house.

"I know the money we will get from that will not amount to a whole lot," he said. "But it would show everybody that we were in dead earnest, and so we could find better backing. At the same time, it would keep the fellows together, because every one of them would be interested in the way the pile of money was growing. The club-house would be free for the boys; there wouldn't be any charge. That's the only fair way, because most of those fellows can't even afford a quarter a week!"

Colonel Henderson, who was there, offered to write a check for one thousand dollars in support of the project, at any time Lenny would say the word. Justin promised to

secure an equal amount by subscription whenever conditions were ripe for the start.

Mrs. Craigie was pleased to see that no one attempted to compliment Lenny on his thoughtfulness in behalf of others. More gratifying to her than this was the natural and unconceited manner in which he looked upon his own activities. She knew that this impressed many, for it had been frequently spoken of to her.

The Colonel's visits to the house now passed without comment from Lenny. At one time during the summer these visits had ceased. The Colonel had put a certain question to Mrs. Craigie, and had received an unfaltering "No!" for an answer. But the visits were resumed; the Colonel came back, apparently humbled, but in reality unbeaten. He asked to be allowed to resume his visits on a basis of friendship. He pleaded with such fine dignity, that Mrs. Craigie could not send him away. She did not know that he was patience itself.

He was sincere, however, when he talked of Lenny's future. Mrs. Craigie was eager that Lenny should finish with his preparatory school education. Since he intended to take law at the University of Pennsylvania, his studying would be done at home, and she would have him near her. This prospect, somehow, did not bring the Colonel a great deal of happiness when they discussed it.

Lenny was more anxious than his mother to be done with the military academy.

"I am not sure of myself at that place," he confided to Conny. "There are so many very young boys all about, that one doesn't feel grown up. I *am* getting older. And there are a whole lot of things I used to care for that don't interest me now. A few months make a lot of difference!"

"I'm feeling old myself," said Conny ruefully.

"Oh, I'd think it would wear anybody out entertaining the number of fellows that come around here!" Lenny remarked with disgust.

"You goose, that's what keeps me young!" was the reply.

Lenny was about to retort, but Maur hove into sight, his muscular body set off to advantage by the clothes he wore. It was his boast that he was as careful as his father about the tailor he chose. At that moment, he looked as if he had stepped out of a fashion plate. His visits to Conny were on the increase, for she was daily growing prettier. He even pretended an interest in Trevor, although this was a trial since he did not like the actor.

Conny saw through his aversion. To make him pay for his fidgetting when he was near her uncle, she brought him to the latter's rooms every time he came. In the end she said:

"I know you don't like him, Bob. I can't understand why. Lenny is glad to go up there every time he comes."

"But it's you I come to see!" Maur insisted.

"That's nice, Bob, I'm sure. But I'm not half so proud about myself as I am about uncle," returned Conny. "I don't know why you don't appreciate him, he is so loving, and there's not a more interesting man in the world."

"I still will have it that it is you I come to see," said Maur. "I am not trying to hide the truth. I want to be honest about it. And I'd really care more for your uncle if you only gave me some of your time alone before the blamed academy opened."

"Why should I give you more time away from uncle?" Conny asked. "You haven't got any consideration when you want anything badly, Bob Maur! It's so much like a kid's way that you'd make even a cat laugh to watch you."

"Can't you be more earnest with me?" said Maur, resentful of the light way she treated his regard for her.

"Why should we be awfully solemn all of a sudden?" Conny demanded. "We weren't any 'mister' or 'miss' so very long ago! Let's see: when did you quit knickerbockers?"

"Do you treat Craigie like this?" Maur asked angrily.

"No!" she answered at once. "Do you know why?"

"Don't talk to me about him!" he cried. "I never pay any attention to him! What is there about him to make a fuss over? If you only saw how he gets along, you'd find that he banks on what his father did! What has he done himself? There's no backbone to him!"

"I remember," Conny mused aloud, "when there wasn't a fellow in our crowd who dared to get Lenny mad. Am I correct, backboney sir?"

The shot told; but Maur swallowed his wrath, and said with a shrug:

"A temper isn't spunk. And just because he is willing to sit around and listen to Mr. Trevor in order to get into your good graces, you needn't expect me to resort to the same means!"

Conny's face became hard.

"Lenny and I," she said with spirit, "have never tried to make believe to each other! There never was any one more honest than he! I am surprised at you!"

"When you get to know the world as much as I do, you won't be swearing by everybody such an awful lot," he said confidently.

"Why, what dreadful ideas to have!" Conny cried in a tone of horror.

"Do you think I'm a romantic fool?" he asked.

"Well, I'm not such a fool either, Bob Maur! If Lenny

was making believe, do you think he could keep it up week after week without my finding it out? You ought to get a better opinion of people before you grow much older, or no one will want to have anything to do with you. I certainly don't!"

In a moment he was pleading for forgiveness in a humbled spirit, against which she could not hold out.

"Of course I'll overlook it; but in case your opinion of me, for forgiving you, Bob, should be pretty small, I want to tell you that I don't respect you as much as I did before."

"That means you don't respect me for saying what I honestly believe," he returned. "It's pretty bad not to be able to lay bare all my thoughts to you!"

"Such thoughts!" And she eyed him wonderingly. "If they were mine, I'd hide them, so no one would ever guess!"

"I'm not ashamed of my honesty!" he offered in defence.

By clinging to this statement, he held his own with her. At the same time he smarted at her preference for Lenny. Despite his regret at having to leave her on his return to the academy, he found some satisfaction in the thought of returning there. He felt that at the school no one would question his supremacy. Lenny would be relegated to an inferior place despite his summer achievement.

Once within the walls of the academy, Maur waited with smiling patience while the flattering attention accorded Lenny wore off. Maur looked forward to the beginning of the regular football practice, certain that Lenny would try for a place on the team.

The latter had wasted no time in getting back to his books, in his determination to make a good record. This, however, did not keep him from getting into football togs

when practice was called. It required but two days for him to discover that Maur was preparing to nullify all his efforts to secure a position on the regular team.

Wild with anger, Lenny kept up such a pace in practice, that it began to be the talk of the school. Maur persisted in keeping him on the scrub team, playing him as quarter-back, in the hope that the exacting position would confuse Lenny. The result was not what Maur expected. Not only were the regulars kept from scoring, but they could not stop the scrub's tricky plays. But still Maur ignored Lenny. He put down the gains of the scrub team to the credit of several of the other men, and advanced these to the regular team. The scrub team, however, continued to score victory after victory.

Lenny saw that Maur would fight the opinion of the whole school if it was necessary to keep him off the team. Although the scrub quarter-back knew that patience would go a long way in winning out over Maur, he found that he would not be able to wait much longer to tell that man what he thought of him and his methods. And when one of Maur's cronies jumped on him after a line play, and on a second occasion put his knee with kicking force into his side, Lenny exploded with wrath, and accused Maur of conspiring to put him out of the game. The lie was passed, and Lenny was ready to fling himself upon the football captain, when the appearance of an instructor belonging to the school put a stop to the threatening hostilities.

Lenny went to the gymnasium and took off his football outfit, his teeth shut tight against the desire to resume practice. Many believed that by next day his anger would be gone, and he would be back on the field. But he smoked himself into a still more hostile frame of mind, and re-

fused to listen to the coaxing of those boys who wished him to re-enter the game.

If the incident angered Lenny, it also gave him some satisfaction. He had demonstrated that he had the making of a first-class player, who, with the proper encouragement, might have proved a valuable asset to the school team. But he soon found that, although the manner in which he had "made good" continued to be the talk of the academy, all friendly support for his course practically vanished after Maur had brilliantly captained the academy team to victory in several contests with outside schools.

Even then Lenny was not sure that the academy had altogether forgotten him. He was confident that once the season was over, the boys in their talk would rake up Maur's behavior, and it would heighten their growing distrust of him. So Lenny once more attacked his books, and tried not to think of the practice daily going on almost under his window.

In this he was aided by the cigarettes in which he indulged, despite the lookout kept by the school authorities for such a breach of discipline. It was the practice of the boys either to lean out of the windows while they smoked, regardless of the weather, or to sit near the draught created by an open window, so that the odor of the cigarettes might be carried out. This latter method was responsible for the first serious scrape into which Lenny got at the academy that fall.

As he was about to go to the window after lighting a cigarette, the door of his room suddenly opened. Lenny felt instinctively that it was an instructor on one of his rounds of inspection. Unable to fling his cigarette out of the window without betraying the action, he crushed it in his hand,

and carelessly seating himself on the bed, he slipped it, supposedly extinguished, under the pillow.

It was done with such speed and smoothness, that the instructor was entirely deceived, although there was the faint odor of cigarette smoke in the room. When the instructor proceeded on his rounds, there was a shrill whistle from below, as a signal for an appointment which Lenny was to keep, and he went down, without giving any thought to the cigarette he had hidden.

An hour later, the boy who roomed with Lenny came to prepare his lessons, but, instead, aroused the whole school with a yell of "Fire!" It had not reached that proporportion, but the smoke which came from the neighborhood of the pillow was sufficiently alarming. It also served to awaken the suspicions of the instructor who had visited the room when Lenny had made away with his cigarette. The result was that the latter was ordered before the head of the academy.

Colonel Ainsworth, the principal, had been an important member of the army before he founded his school. In order not to drive boys away, he had been forced to modify the ideas of discipline with which he had unmercifully handled enlisted men. The result was that the discipline of the school oscillated between merciless bulldozing and no discipline at all.

In Lenny's case the principal was particularly troubled because during the previous year Mrs. Craigie had written to inquire what was being done by the academy to check smoking. At that time he had replied that it was entirely stamped out. And now her own son had almost burned down the academy with a cigarette!

The Colonel was bald, rather stout, and with a protruding chest, which gave him an air of dignity. A weak jaw,

however, undid the formidable appearance he sought to present. He looked better standing up than sitting, for his long legs carried a somewhat short bust. But though he always stood when boys were brought before him, they were never impressed—a fact of which he was well aware.

As Lenny entered the Colonel's room, he saluted the figure standing solemnly near the desk. There was no one else present. The Colonel believed that he could manage without the attendance of the accusing instructor.

"And so, Craigie, you defy our discipline, and smoke!" he delivered himself with elevated brows. "What is more, you try to burn down the building over our heads! I expect a full confession from you, sir! Let us have it. It will save much annoyance and misunderstanding."

Seeing from the Colonel's air that he was in possession of the main facts, Lenny told what had happened. When he finished, the Colonel said:

"But you are not the only one at the academy who smokes."

"I would rather speak for myself," returned Lenny.

"Well," said the Colonel, stiffening, "I have made up my mind to break up the habit here! It is the ruin of the health and discipline of the academy. Since you will not aid me in any way, I cannot be lenient."

Still Lenny refused to play the informer. The principal, drawing himself up, imposed sentence.

"Since I have reason to believe that you picked up the habit while with us, and that we are therefore indirectly responsible for it, I will not summarily expel you," he said. "But this breach of discipline, which almost destroyed the establishment, is to be brought to the attention of the whole academy. Then after a short time, you

will leave. I have not yet decided how long you will stay before you go."

A red swirl swept before Lenny's eyes. He had to put his hand on the back of a chair to keep from falling over. The Colonel saw a very pale boy whose eyes glowed wildly.

"You mean to make an example of me?" asked Lenny in a choking voice.

"I am not to be interrogated!" was the reply. "You do not seem to realize that your presence here almost cost us life and property. You are very thoughtless, and, I might say, very dangerous. Patience has ceased to be a virtue! I shall no longer be lenient!"

Lenny was thinking fast, and, oddly enough, found himself very calm. A few seconds served to create for him the picture of his mother receiving the news of his expulsion. Then he saw the great stir it would make in Germantown. At a stroke he decided on desperate measures.

"I don't believe," he said deliberately, "that I will wait to be kicked out. I'll go to-day. And now, if you will excuse me, I will telephone home. You are at liberty to tell the boys that you expelled me."

Instead of a rebuke, Lenny was astonished to hear in mournful accents:

"Ah, Craigie, can this be the son of the gallant Captain? I am sorry for your mother."

This was too much for Lenny, who burst out:

"I suppose, sir, you are sorry for my mother! But as for making an example of me—well, isn't it too much like a joke to pick me out for punishment when the other fellows who have smoked never had anything done to them? I'm not the worst. People will see that right away. They won't understand why it was I who was picked out. I may have been thoughtless, sir, but I'm not usually given to

destroying property or lives. I'm not such an awful criminal. It doesn't seem quite fair to make an example of me."

"Craigie," stormed the Colonel, "stop at once! Go to your room! You will know shortly just how I will dispose of this! Silence, sir!"

Lenny went through the empty formula of a salute, and retired.

His roommate asked:

"Was it really a cigarette that set the bed on fire, Len?"

"Now, honestly, don't you think a piece of chewing-gum could do it?" was all the satisfaction he got.

Then Lenny settled himself for a letter, which ran as follows:

DEAR JUSTIN MAHAN: I'm in a deuce of a stew here—except that it was more like a roast. I put a cigarette under my pillow so one of the teachers who popped in wouldn't catch me smoking, and the whole bed smoked, too. The Colonel who runs this pop-gun academy threatens to raise some more smoke by firing me—as an example. I don't really think he will if some one talks to him. He's got to be headed off mighty quick. I would be sorry about being expelled, because of mother.

Would you care to come up to the school to see the Colonel, and to tell him I'm not a crook, or in the habit of burning down places as valuable as this? It hurts all over to think that I am to be picked out as a bad case of wickedness. I know the Colonel would give you a hearing.

As your client, would you mind if I asked you to keep mum about this? Please oblige,

Yours sincerely,

LEONARD EWART CRAIGIE (LENNY).

P. S.—The Colonel smokes, too, so if you bring along a couple of good cigars, it ought to help.

Another P. S.—This may sound as if I wasn't in earnest. But you have no idea how I feel. And it grows worse every minute.

By the time Lenny had turned in for sleep, the whole school knew that his case was a serious one. In the mess-

room next morning, many crowded about him with questions, and he was the subject of considerable discussion. There was no chance for sympathy, since he was not inclined to air his troubles. In fact, he talked very little. He was anxiously awaiting the outcome of his letter, although he was certain that Justin would not fail him.

As he dwelt on the difficulty in which he found himself, his anxiety increased. The expulsion itself did not matter much, particularly as it would bring the substitution of a tutor for the academy. He was concerned about the distress it would create at home. He wondered which would be the greater blow to his mother—the enforced withdrawal from the school, or the fact that it was the result of his smoking.

For a few moments Lenny, suddenly frightened, was inclined to call in Colonel Henderson to help him. But though a boy, he saw how it would put him under obligation to his mother's admirer, and pride kept him from making this move, despite the fact that the conference of the two colonels would have smoothed matters out.

So he put his entire trust in Justin, who was prompt to respond to the appeal. Instead of first seeing Lenny, Mahan sent up his card to the Colonel, and was immediately shown into his office. Justin had no difficulty in sizing up the former army man as a weak individual, whose main object in life was to squeeze dollars out of his school.

After briefly giving his reasons for coming to the academy, Justin added:

"I would like to act for both mother and son, even if it was Leonard who called me in." Then he asked for an exact statement of what had occurred.

At first the Colonel was disinclined to put himself out

for the young man who sat composedly opposite him; and he declared pompously:

"I would prefer to deal directly with Mrs. Craigie, rather than with any representative of the boy."

"It would be unfortunate, perhaps, to bring this to her attention," said Justin thoughtfully. "She is not a very strong woman. You know how frail she is. And Leonard is her only child. When it comes to placing the blame, she might be inclined to feel outraged that he should have learned to smoke at this place."

"Am I to be held responsible for that?" cried the Colonel vehemently, taken aback by the argument. "They acquire other habits here. Am I for that reason to put a guard over every boy? Impossible, sir! That sort of thing is unattainable even at home!"

"I am still not convinced that it is impossible to check the boys' constant smoking," persisted Justin. "It would seem more reasonable to do that than to seek to make an example of one who had innocently acquired the habit at the academy. Leonard Craigie is not naturally vicious. I am sure that you do not believe he is! Why you should want to strike at him by any punishment which would hold him up to ridicule is beyond me!"

"To conceal his cigarette—to virtually lie about it—!" began the Colonel, trying to be stern.

"That was an impulse on his part," said Justin. "Nothing more. Every one will tell you that he is an honorable chap. But what we have to consider is how Mrs. Craigie will feel when she finds that expulsion came on top of his having acquired the habit here! And allow me to put this to you: Mrs. Craigie has an unusually large circle of friends who are very fond of Leonard. They will not readily believe the worst of him. What they will wonder

at is that he should have been punished, and others passed by. If I may be permitted to say it, it would be unfortunate for the academy. Consider! All this publicity would advertise, not your strict discipline, but the fact that there was smoking at your school! That is the thing which would linger in the memory of people after they had forgotten all about Lenny's expulsion. It's human nature!"

The Colonel was frightened.

"But to burn down a bed!" he murmured helplessly, missing his chance for sounder argument.

"Allow me to ask this: Is Leonard Craigie one of your worst pupils?" demanded Justin. "Is it customary with him to defy your discipline? Has he been a leader in what trouble you may have had at the academy? Then why not show some leniency? Allow me to suggest that you have him apologize before the assembled school for this act. Do not, I pray you, bring grief to his mother by using drastic measures."

The Colonel showed signs of relenting. He said with a shake of the head:

"Craigie would not allow himself to get up before the whole school and admit his fault. He would balk at the idea."

"Ah, but I give you my word that he will not!" cried Justin; although the next moment he felt that a tussle would be needed to bend the boy's pride.

"Very well, sir, I agree to that!" the Colonel conceded. "I will do it for his mother—and for the sake of the memory of the brave Captain!"

The concession was made so pompously, that Justin was amused. He said with a bow, "I knew you would think of them."

"Do you wish to see Craigie?" asked the principal. "If you do, lecture him for his act! Impress upon him its enormity."

"I shall. But I would prefer to take him aside rather than have it out here," advised Justin. "He would feel rebellious under your eye, and what I would have to say would be lost upon him."

"Then I will have him sent up to his room, and you can see him there. He is in the Latin class at present."

Justin was guided to Lenny's quarters. The latter soon came in, with a hesitating air, as if he feared that some one else than Justin might be there. On catching sight of the visitor, he gave a glad cry.

"You young scoundrel!" laughed Justin.

"Oh, I know it was pretty bad!" said Lenny seriously, thus pleasing the man who had come to intercede for him. "But I felt awful at the notion of the Colonel picking me out as an example! If he had only shown the least fairness, it would have been different."

"Although you were really to be fired," said Justin, smiling, "and the fact burned into the memory of every boy who came here, I hardly feel that your principal is now going to do either. To tell the truth, when I heard the story from him, I was not pleased with the idea of your being punished by a man of that sort. And, anyhow, there is no particular fun in seeing you picked out as a bad case. The Colonel is afraid that somehow he hasn't been strict enough about the smoking. But you're to be let off easy."

"Mother to be told, eh?" Lenny said, trying not to show his anxiety.

"No. You are to make a public apology for the accident." Then when Justin saw the distress on Lenny's

face, he said in a tone of pleading, "I gave the Colonel my word you would. I believed you'd get up and say the few words he expects of you."

"Why, yes," said Lenny, drawing a long breath, "I will."

"It's a big thing for a fellow to do—to stand up and admit he was in the wrong!" Justin let him see another side to the issue.

"Oh, that part of it was all right," said Lenny. "But I'm not feeling up to the mark these days, and I don't like getting up before all the boys. I get so nervous, that I can't find my voice. But I'll do it."

"Right, old man!" cried Justin. "Bully boy! I knew you would rise to the occasion."

"But hadn't you better tell me what you said to the Colonel?" Lenny coaxed. "You must have got around him somehow. He wanted to make it harder when I saw him, you know."

"Never mind how I did it!" laughed Justin. "You come along for a talk with him."

It was not exactly a crushed wrongdoer that Justin led into the principal's room, and even the latter was conscious of Lenny's dignity and impressed by his frank avowal of wrong.

Justin left the school with an odd feeling at heart. Before him trooped his own many "prep" and college days, all alive with boys and men and festivities and stirring athletic contests. The whole now seemed part of some dream; and he wondered at the distance separating him from the countless happy hours spent with schoolmates, who were now scattered far and wide, and from whom he rarely heard, except at an occasional commencement.

"Time flies. There is no going back," he mused. "Even the fellows are not the same now that they were."

He thought of several whom failure had blighted; of some who cared little for place or fame, and lived quietly; of others, again, who were eager for the best that life could give them, and who struggled to obtain a high place. A few had been swept away by death.

He considered his own future. Against the great joy of knowing that it would be only a short time before Gertrude would consent to their marriage, there was to be counted the fact that he was not finding his own advancement in politics easy. The small part he had played in the fall elections dismayed him. The fault, he admitted, did not altogether lie with the ward boss. Justin had not been able to do the campaigning he had laid out for himself. Strength had not come to him as abundantly as he could call it forth in the past.

This had frightened him into a visit to a physician. The latter put the blame upon his smoking; and Justin resigned it for just three days. Finding no improvement in his condition at the end of that time, and tempted back to his cigarettes, he had gone to another physician. This one overlooked the cigarettes and advised less office work. Justin was disgusted by this conflict of opinion.

"Medicine," he had mentally growled as he left the physician's office, "is the only profession in which dangerous guesswork is made legal!"

On the train from the academy into Philadelphia, his thoughts gradually grew more cheerful, and finally dwelt on the manner in which he had aided Lenny.

"I would not have missed that for any court victory!" he exclaimed. "To think of that Colonel getting ready to pillory Lenny without a grain of sympathy for a decent chap like him! I suppose the boy will tell his mother in

good time. And he won't hesitate to get up and declare his mistake before the whole school, either!"

Could he have seen how Lenny began to be troubled about this, Justin might have been dubious about his victory. It was not the shame of publicly apologizing which distressed Lenny, but the thought of facing a large crowd. The longer he worried about it, the more fearful did the coming ordeal grow. Two days were to intervene, but each day assumed the proportion of weeks.

During recitations his attention would constantly wander from the work in hand to what he would say in the assembly hall. It was not long before he began to regard the position in which he found himself as a worse punishment than expulsion itself. Every hour proved a terrible strain, and he showed the effects of it.

He was certain that his voice would break when he spoke. In the period through which he had already passed, he had found it difficult to speak with ease while reciting. As he pictured himself climbing up the platform steps in the assembly hall, he trembled with fear.

He began to consider ways by which he might evade going through the ordeal. There was a chance that if he went to the Colonel and told him how he was suffering, he might be released from his promise. On the other hand, the Colonel might set him down as a coward. Soon he began to believe that the only way of ending the torture was to leave the academy, and to make a clean breast of his wrong-doing to his mother. He was tempted to do so, but put aside the thought.

On the night before the eventful day, Lenny did not sleep a wink. He arose in the morning with his eyeballs on fire and his limbs hot. Not a morsel of breakfast passed his lips. When he stood on his feet, he shook like a leaf.

"I'm licked!" he grieved. "It's no use! I've got to tell the old man that I'm down and out!"

And he sought the office, white-faced, trembling, haggard, yet desperate. He did not care what the outcome would be, for he saw only defeat ahead. The Colonel, who had been about to go out, looked curiously at the boy. Lenny saluted and waited to be asked what he wanted.

In answer to the principal's "What is it, sir?" he said:

"I am not feeling very well. In fact, I'm pretty sick. I'm afraid I won't be able to do to-day what you wanted me to. And I'd like to get excused from recitations. I'm really sick. I'm not shamming, sir."

"Just what is the matter with you?" asked the head of the school, who was inclined to believe the boy from the external evidences he presented.

"I don't know," replied Lenny. "I am weak all over. My heart beats too strongly, and my head is dizzy. I feel as if somebody was sitting on my chest. If you please, sir, could I call up home on long distance? I think I ought to be there."

He was trembling perceptibly now.

"Come, don't be frightened!" said the Colonel, somewhat scared himself. "Go to your room and lie down, and I will have the doctor take a look at you. You'll feel better soon. You are excused from recitations."

Murmuring his thanks, Lenny staggered up to his room. There he fell across the bed, and lay with a madly beating heart, shaking from head to foot. The physician who was called in prescribed quiet, and had Lenny transferred to a room where he would not be disturbed. To the Colonel the physician said:

"You've got a bad attack of nerves on your hands there. Keep him quiet for a week. It won't be the last time he

will go to pieces like that. He's the type. A frequent instance of too much energy at one moment, and none at all the next. It's the American disease."

"He was to have been disciplined," said the Colonel, "but I guess that's all off. I don't want to make any mistakes. You're sure he isn't shamming?"

"With that pulse? By the way, I saw the yellow stains on his fingers. They will smoke despite you, eh?"

"He was going to be disciplined for it," said the Colonel.

"A little easier than disciplining the whole school, I suppose!" laughed the physician. "Three-fourths of your boys are users of cigarettes. Why don't you apply the brakes?"

Since the physician and the Colonel were good friends, the latter could express his helplessness openly.

"They'd find a pretext for going elsewhere, if I did put on the brakes," said the principal with a shrug. "If I did not care about that and tried to stop the smoking, I'd have to double my staff. I remember how I used to get around watchful people in my own day."

"Those boys will pay for it," remarked the physician.

"Pooh! Has it harmed me?" cried the Colonel, throwing out his chest, and stretching himself to his full height.

"Um, well, your eyes are not of the best," the physician began. "And your digestion is not a winner. To amble over to your circulation, why, that is rather poor. You are liable to colds of the throat. The occasional ringing in your ears you complain of isn't due to the pressure of thoughts in your head. And those lazy spells which bother you come from the same source. If you would quit smoking, you would have a few more years to yourself before you joined your fathers and bereaved your pupils."

All the Colonel said in answer was:

"Have a cigar, Bill. I've got a new brand you'll like."

CHAPTER VIII

ALTHOUGH the terror of being publicly branded was past, Lenny did not immediately return to his former cheerfulness. One idea now possessed him—to be done with the academy as soon as possible, and to have a tutor prepare him for college. His letters occupied themselves more and more with this, and he built his ambitions around it to such an extent that his mother found herself falling in with his plans.

She believed that his work with the baseball league had suddenly matured him, and that the academy could never be pleasing again. This did not make her altogether happy. She would have preferred that he remain very much of a boy for some time to come.

His spell of illness had not been allowed to worry her, for Lenny insisted that she should not be told at once, and the Colonel had agreed. When Lenny did write of it, after resuming his work, it was mentioned carelessly.

"The Colonel wished to spare me useless worry, I suppose," Mrs. Craigie reflected, never having been able to see the weaknesses of the principal. "I am sorry Lenny is thinking of leaving the academy."

She felt less regret, however, when she learned that one of the boys of the school had been expelled for stealing—a thing before unheard of there. Lenny had not been her

informant in this, and he appeared reluctant to discuss it when she asked him about it.

Of well-to-do parents, there was no reason why Sylvester Bancroft, the expelled student, should have resorted to stealing. Many complaints of the loss of valuables brought a strict watch, and Bancroft was trapped. The sort of boy he was showed in a remark of one of his classmates.

"When he came, we called him Sylvy. 'Silly' was good enough lately."

After he had been sent home, the boys spoke in derision of his "chalk-face" and his cigarette-stained fingers. He was known to have the widest range of oaths ever heard at the academy. Yet there were many who remembered him as an unusually pleasant chap when he first came.

The Colonel was hard hit by the occurrence. He roundly lectured the school on vicious habits, and made a reference to "one among you who almost destroyed the academy because of the vile habit of smoking."

"It was cigarettes which led Bancroft to his downfall!" he thundered at the assembled school. "I shall stamp this out, if it costs me my entire attendance!"

He became vigilant, and for a time the neighboring tobacco stores found their incomes dwindling. Lenny did not touch a cigarette for three weeks, not because of the watch which had been set, but out of fear that cigarettes might work some great harm which would make another Bancroft of him. But when temptation sorely beset him, he laughed himself out of the fear that smoking could be responsible for rascality.

"Isn't Justin Mahan the soul of honor?" he argued. "Oh, I can indulge a little—I haven't any other vices. And if I have overdone it, it's because of the terrible dullness here. Once I am out of the place, and begin real study

and real work, there will be something else to think of. It isn't hurting me, anyhow."

So he returned to his cigarettes, although he was very careful to avoid detection. Discovery would have been disastrous, for the Colonel was in no mood to be lenient. In fact, he eyed Lenny rather sternly every time they met.

The approaching Christmas holidays meant more for that boy than an opportunity of seeing his mother. He wanted to discuss the matter of leaving the academy, and to exact some promise on that score. At the same time he intended to have Justin put in a word for him. He was certain that his hopes would prevail, and so the day of departure for home found him no longer worried and wan, but cheerful and smiling.

His mother's unconcealed joy as she put her arms around him smote his conscience. He regretted keenly at that moment that he had not, in his letters, confessed about his smoking. But this feeling of compunction soon vanished.

"A fellow can't tell his mother everything," he argued.

At dinner, he asked her whether she was displeased with his first term's marks.

"Not if I knew you were a little remorseful about your laziness," she said with a smile.

"Well," he returned gravely, "I feel out of place at the academy. It began with Maur. I was disgusted to see that bully lead the school around by the nose. The place didn't seem pleasant because of him. But I also saw that I wasn't really preparing for college. I am not sure that the academy will help me in my entrance exams. So there you are! When a fellow's half-hearted, he's not going to exert himself. I'd like to have a big pace set me! Oh, I'm not just mooning, mother!"

Then he showered her with questions about Conny, Ger-

trude, and Trevor. She tried to answer his inquiries as fast as they were put.

She did not say that she was very much at a loss to understand Trevor's position in the household, although his pent-up life mystified her. It had become a subject for neighborhood gossip. But Mrs. Craigie had never gone farther than to remark to herself, "It is all very strange; but we shall know what it means in time, since Gertrude has nothing to hide."

The gossips were not so kind. Trevor learned of this from chance remarks dropped by Conny. It worried him. He asked himself whether he would not in the end be standing in his daughter's way, if there was a chance of her marrying well.

"True, it would be very hard to go away," he said with a groan. "And I may even have been of help to her. But this gossip is bound to hurt her—and her aunt. No! No! I must not stay!"

For a week his hours were filled with fearful debate. At times he thought of stealing off, never to return. This seemed cowardly. So he summed up courage one day, and presented himself before Gertrude.

"I want to ask a favor of you," he said, his attitude very humble—so humble that Gertrude dismissed the idea that he was going to beg for the right to tell Conny of his relationship to her.

"I want to go away," he announced.

She gazed at him with an air of stupefaction.

"To go away!" she repeated mechanically.

"Yes. I know that my presence in this house is becoming the talk of those about us; and rather than stand in your way or Conny's, I will take myself off. I am feeling a little stronger; and perhaps if I went to England, I could

do character work on the stage. I would prefer to drop out of your lives. I feel how much of an intruder I have been."

Gertrude turned away a little with lowered head. When she spoke at last, there was a tremor in her voice.

"I want to ask a favor of *you,*" she said. Trevor's eyes opened wide. "I want you to take your meals at my table," she told him.

"And not to go away?" he gasped.

"No. I wish you to remain with us," she said.

"But think——" he cried.

"About what people will say, Mr. Trevor? They gossip about everyone," Gertrude returned calmly.

"Believe me," he stammered, "I cannot bear this good fortune!" Then he pointed out, "See how hard it will be for you and myself if I should come into your dining-room—where she—Marie—ate! If you but knew how her presence seems to fill this house! At nights I start at what appear to be footfalls!—No! No! I must not tell you these things!"

He buried his face in his hands. Gertrude had to exert great will power to keep from going over to him, and soothing him.

"No," she said instead, "you must not tell me things like that." She asked, "Do your surroundings wear too much upon you? I know everything suggests Marie. But worse than all is our silence about your relationship to Conny."

She waited for him to speak, fearful that her kindness had given him an advantage. He said:

"I am not restive under that silence. Will you allow me to make a bargain? When you have completely forgiven me, I will be ready to consider telling Conny who I am. I

do not promise to tell her even then. But I will be free to consider it." Then he cried, "No! no! We must not think of it at all! I am not worthy! I am not worthy!" Gathering himself together, he said with an effort at composure, "I will dine at your table, if you so wish."

"I do wish it," replied Gertrude. When Trevor bowed his way out, she asked herself in wonder, "What can time not do if this is the man whose heartlessness almost killed Marie?"

It was at the dining-table that Lenny found Trevor on the next day. The surprise of the visitor was evident enough, although he tried to conceal it. Trevor sought to save the situation by commenting on Lenny's changed appearance.

"I would say you were graver," he declared. "It is not the proper air to bring home for the holidays. Do they not mean the same to you as in the past? What is it that Shakespeare says about holidays? Ah, yes—

> "'If all the year were playing holidays,
> To sport would be as tedious as to work.'

But I do not think we sport enough in life; and if we use an hour for lighter things, we take it too seriously, the way you do your athletics."

Conny proposed, "Suppose we get up a little play for New Year's Eve!"

The momentary light in Trevor's eyes showed how much he was tempted. But he foresaw that the rehearsals which would have to be undertaken with the necessary boys and girls would focus the attention of the community upon him. He started when he remembered that Conny was waiting for his answer. Gertrude's lowered eyes hurried him into speech.

"No," he said, "I cannot."

"Why?" asked Conny.

Gertrude was wondering how to close the discussion without appearing to interfere. But Trevor saved the evening in his own way.

"I do not wish to create false longings for acting and the stage," he said, with a touch of sternness. "I am not so sure now, when I see what is becoming of the theater in our country, that I would serve any good purpose by inflaming boys and girls with a desire for it. The applause of friends and relatives here might give them an exaggerated notion of what they could do. Then when they would be confronted by failure and misery in their attempts to get a foothold on the professional stage, they would lay the blame at my door. The theater called Life is trying enough. Let us be satisfied with that!"

His voice had taken on an oratorical tone and he spoke almost grandly. When he found Gertrude staring at him, he blushed like a girl.

"But a pretty little play wouldn't spoil any of us, I'm sure," argued Conny. "Oh, don't be afraid of my running off and joining some company. I know that I would be a grand failure on the stage!"

But Trevor knew otherwise. He had watched with uneasiness Conny's wonderful power of mimicry. Her ability to play a part had often encouraged him to fancy her toying with audiences, making them worship her, laugh with her, cry with her, and sending them away enthralled. At those moments, his hopes for a daughter who would win fame on two continents battled with his fears.

Sitting at Gertrude's table, he cringed from these thoughts.

"I am not afraid of your running away," he said un-

steadily. "You have more useful work to do in the world than to amuse people, and to wear yourself out doing so. If you must dream, let it be in other directions."

When Conny was alone with him in his own room, she shook her finger at him and cried:

"You said that just for Aunt Gertrude's sake! Don't I know? To lecture like that after all the wonderful things you told me about the stage! If I'd been an actor, I would have stuck up for my profession! Oh, yes, I would!"

"It would kill me if I thought I was influencing you to go on the stage!" Trevor said sternly. Then he asked, more calmly, "Why didn't you bring Lenny up with you?"

"Justin Mahan came in, and they're planning about that baseball league for next summer. Oh, why can't a boy be a boy for all time? Lenny has grown to be as solemn as a rooster! Here I go after him!"

She rushed downstairs to break up the baseball conference, and brought Lenny back with her.

"Uncle and I decided that you can put that talk off for at least a couple of months!" she told him. "As punishment for hunting game out of season, you are to promise me something."

Thinking it was to be something trifling, he nodded.

"You are to try for the baseball team this spring at the academy—and to try hard!" was the unexpected demand.

When Lenny had recovered his composure, he could only insist, "Of course I'll not! No, sir! I wont!" Then he asked, "Someone has been putting you up to this! Don't get out of it now!"

"All I know is that you've promised!" Conny said.

"It's been mother!" Lenny suddenly exclaimed. The silence which followed this guess convinced him of its

correctness. He pleaded, "Can't you see that even if it is my last spring at the academy, Maur wouldn't forgive me for the way I've called him down about his crookedness in athletics? I know mother wants me to try——"

"Gabby, it wasn't altogether your mother!" Conny broke in. "She *does* want you in the practice for the ball team, and she *has* spoken of the way you've cut out athletics. But she hasn't put me up to this!"

Lenny spent some moments in hard thought. Then he waved aside the plea. "There's no use letting Maur get an extra laugh on me before I quit the school!" he said. He added, "It's been awfully good of you, Conny, to think of what mother would want." Then he asked, "Mr. Trevor, is pride a bad thing?"

"Aye, that it is!" came in a sad voice. "But perhaps you are right in refusing to allow Mr. Maur to humble you again."

"Now I've got you!" cried Conny. "At last I've heard you find fault with someone right out aloud! Poor Bob! Poor Bob!"

Then believing that she had thoughtlessly wounded her uncle, she began a series of capers about the room; and finally burst out into a Christmas carol, in which she insisted that Lenny should join.

Trevor was beginning to find joy in watching young people. It was for that reason that he had listened with keen interest to Lenny's account of his quarrel with the academy ball team. It was the sincerity of young people which cheered the actor. He saw that the exception among them was Maur. But Trevor's distrust of him also grew out of the fear that the bulldog tenacity of that boy might in time fascinate Conny, and that she might learn to love him.

"I must teach her the value of thoughtfulness, just as she has educated me to laughter," he planned.

He could not understand how he had managed to get along during the last years without the light-heartedness which Conny now brought him. Her sunny moods drove the shadows from the rooms. When Conny smiled it seemed that the whole house was glad. The merry gleam in her eyes would often save Trevor from fits of depression. Her prattle made him a willing listener. He saw why she had the reputation for brightening men and women three times her age.

"She has made me sleek with contentment," he would murmur.

It was her presence which helped him to forget that he was practically an invalid, and that his nervous condition was no passing ailment. When he had spoken to Gertrude of going to England to act, it was out of sheer desperation. A few days of hard work would have meant a serious relapse. Even when he entertained Conny's visitors for a few hours, it taxed his strength. Of this he never spoke to anyone. His ills were forgotten when Conny would say:

"The boys and girls all glory in you! You are like a person out of a story-book to them! How, uncle, did I ever do without you?"

It could not be otherwise when he spent most of his moments in planning to interest her, and in seeking in every possible way to add to her happiness. Her books occupied his leisure moments. She discussed her likes and dislikes with him. She told him all her thoughts.

He sought to have her reason clearly, for he was not sure that unhappiness might not come to her, and he wanted her sensitive nature strengthened.

At times he would cry:

"Marie, Marie, surely you are watching! Help me! For I am groping. Even if you have not forgiven me, remember that I must help to mould her future! I must understand her heart!"

In these moments of loneliness, he questioned the wisdom of his silence about his paternity. There were times when his patience suddenly dwindled, and he was forced to fight fiercely against the impulse to gather Conny into his arms, and to tell her who he was. But he kept sternly reminding himself:

"That would not be atonement for my cruelty to Marie! I must not fail my soul! Is it not enough that I can see the child's face from day to day?"

He had never written a line of drama, despite the years he had spent upon other people's lines. But now there were occasions when he would see his own life in the light of a subject for a play. This, too, was part of his self-punishment, for the episodes of this play were like a flaming sword to his conscience. He would end by being mentally crushed under the weight of their accusations. No crueler task could have been set for him.

The sad hours brought him by memory Conny never guessed as she eagerly watched the seamed face. Her "uncle" refused to speak of her father except when she caught him off his guard. But he never touched on Robert Trevor the actor without bringing in the failings of Robert Trevor the man.

"I guess you will be the last one to forgive him," Conny said with a sigh one day.

"I hope so! I hope so!" was the fervent reply.

"What!" she gasped, amazed by this seeming cruelty.

"Oh, how can you, uncle? You, the kindest man in the world!"

"Because I know how much there is to forgive," said Trevor. "But let us not speak of it any more," he pleaded.

"But *I* forgive him!" said Conny.

Trevor helplessly averted his head.

Lenny, for one, was not altogether ignorant of the grief Conny felt at this strange silence about her parents. There were moments when she would suddenly come out of a spell of cheerfulness to give herself to tears. Lenny was not only tactful enough not to speak of it to anyone, but he never asked her for an explanation. It only confirmed Conny's belief that he was growing "queer."

When she charged him with ceasing to like her, as he stood before her to say good-by when the holidays were at an end, he first laughed, then reminded her:

"I'm about ready to enter the university, you know. So the quicker I get rid of kid habits, the better. That's why I'm quieter now, I guess."

"Am I one of your kid habits?" she asked.

It gave them a chance to part jokingly. But Conny repeated her charge of "queer" before Mrs. Craigie. The latter warned her:

"Don't tell him he is. You don't want to put such ideas in his head. We must not show ourselves too conscious about his growing up. It is bad enough that he is worrying about his future already."

"Well, I guess I'm some of his future, too!" said Conny innocently. "He's got to worry a little about me."

His mother laughingly admitted the soundness of the argument. After Conny had gone, Mrs. Mulholland insisted that it was a very sound argument indeed, and a

sign that the two young people were more than ordinarily fond of each other.

"Oh, you mustn't plan ahead for them that way!" exclaimed Mrs. Craigie. "How little you allow for the changes time will bring! Lenny will be more and more engrossed in his work; and before he has had a chance to thoroughly prepare himself for life, Conny will be carried off by some suitor. She will have many. She is growing more beautiful every day. You must know that a girl at twenty-one is ready to become the mistress of a household; Lenny at twenty-one will be just beginning to climb the ladder of his profession."

But Mrs. Mulholland kept her own counsel in the matter. And she was continually advancing arguments to herself to back up her hopes.

"Haven't they always picked each other out in the crowd?" she would ask. "Isn't she always coming here to talk about him? Hasn't he begun to be a little shy about her?"

At the same time, this did not prevent her from seeing possible rivals in the other boys who called upon Conny. She was also somewhat concerned at the latter's frequent mention of Bob Maur's name, even if Conny did not show herself over-enthusiastic about him.

Mrs. Mulholland would have been worried had she known how untiringly Maur kept up his campaign of interesting Conny, how frequently he wrote her, and of the gifts he sent. For Maur's whole life was run on a systematic plan. His shrewdness had allowed him to keep his hold upon the academy boys. But this had ceased to be his ambition. He was building for the future, and the academy had grown to be unimportant. His immediate goal was not a career at college, despite the athletic honors it promised, but his

father's brokerage office. In preparation for this, he was reading stock-market literature.

Lenny's seriousness was not lost upon him. For a time he was of the belief that the smoking in which Lenny indulged would cripple all that boy's efforts. Lenny's thoughtful manner, however, and the report that he was making ready for college forced Maur to resign this idea. There came a time soon after the Christmas holidays when the older boy began to consider whether it would not be wise to patch up his differences with Lenny.

"If he goes down and out," reasoned Maur, "I can't be the loser for standing in with him. If he succeeds, why, it will never do for me to have him strong with Conny, and me his enemy."

He told himself that he was not afraid of Lenny as a possible rival in Conny's affection, especially when, in time, she should grow serious about the idea of marriage. But he decided, nevertheless, to make his peace with Lenny. After knocking about for an excuse to break down the barriers between them, he hit upon the plan of offering Lenny the manager's post on the academy baseball team.

When he approached Lenny, the latter was thunderstruck.

"Why do you want me on the ball-team?" he asked when he had recovered from his astonishment.

Suspicion was in his tone, and his manner was not inviting. Maur, however, overlooked this, for he had been prepared to be received in just this way.

"I saw what you did with the league last summer," he said. "That proved to me how well you could manage. We won't have a cinch this season. It's your last year and mine at the academy, and we want to see that the school makes a record in the Inter-Academic before we go."

Lenny was silent for a moment. He suddenly said:

"If the fellows really want me, let *them* ask me."

"I'm running the team," replied Maur decisively.

"And the whole school, too!—I know it!" said Lenny. "But I never cared for a one-man team. If the boys elect me manager, I will consider the offer. Put it up to them first. So far, no one else has spoken to me about it. But it must come from the whole team; understand?"

It was a bitter pill for Maur to swallow. But swallow it he did, like a good politician.

"I was throwing out a feeler to see if you cared to manage the team," he said. "Of course, it's up to the boys now."

He and Lenny separated without further words. Maur was so filled with rage that he was sorely tempted to get the team to vote down his own suggestion, when it was made. But in a few hours he was himself again.

On the next day he approached Lenny and put out his hand.

"Shake!" he said. "You're to manage the team! It was unanimous! The boys were glad to know you would do it!"

Then Lenny stunned him by declaring:

"I have decided not to. Tell the boys that I'm sorry I can't do it for them, but that I appreciated their vote of confidence."

As he turned on his heel, conscious that Maur was left speechless, baffled, furious and white, Lenny felt that there had been some squaring of accounts. He had at last partly repaid the other for the many humiliations, and for the persistency with which Maur had kept him off the athletic field. Not a pang of regret marred Lenny's feeling of triumph. He realized then, more clearly than ever, that life

at the academy would have been a great deal of an inspiration and a finer thing in many ways if Maur had not been there. So he looked upon his humbling of the "boss" of the school, in so decisive a manner, as a worthy task well accomplished.

CHAPTER IX

INTENT upon finishing up his academy work creditably, and beginning as soon as possible the bigger work which was to follow, Lenny resisted the temptation of trying for a place on the ball team that spring. Maur's antagonism would not have deterred him. Lenny felt that there was room for a public clash. Opposition to Maur had cropped up in several quarters, and the school was ready to awaken to the fact that he had been running things with a high hand. And since it promised to be Lenny's last year at the academy, the boys would have encouraged his trials for the shortstop position.

But there loomed before Lenny the words, "Mahan and Craigie, Attorneys-at-law;" and he was eager for the time when this ambition would be realized. Maur played no part in his plans for the future.

"Wait until he gets out of the academy! It won't be so easy for him to boss everybody!" was the way Lenny dismissed him from his thoughts.

Another reason for his withdrawal from athletics was the somewhat backward physical condition in which he found himself. He could not altogether understand this.

"Too much study hasn't done it," he reflected. "I've studied just as hard in other years. It can't be the smoking, for that sort of tones me up when I get fagged. I wonder what it is!"

He came to the conclusion that his summer's stay in town had not been in his favor. This did not deter him, however, from planning to further strengthen the baseball league. The fund for its permanent home was growing. Another successful season would bring still more generous support. And Lenny made ready to catch the well-to-do Germantown dwellers before they departed for the various summer resorts.

When the academy sessions closed, he was full of regret for the many farewells his going meant. He never believed that so many boys would care. But as his home came into sight, after he left the train, this ceased to occupy him.

His mother was more inclined to discuss the next fall's tutoring, than his intended stay in Germantown that summer to further the success of the league.

"You are not looking well," she said.

"Ah, but I was living indoors!" he replied. "We'll give the league a chance to reverse things. I'll be on the outside most of the time, you know."

"Outside during hot weather is as bad as inside during winter," she argued.

There was a discussion until he promised to spend part of his summer away from Germantown.

"Of course, I shall do a little reading each day on the subjects I will have to prepare for college, whether it is summer or not!" he said.

But almost immediately he was forced to scurry about to secure grounds for the numerous clubs, because several of the vacant lots had been used for the erection of houses.

"The men I go to for the money," he told Conny, "are not so slow to respond to the 'touch' as they were last

summer. Is it because I have added to my growth, or because the league has made good?"

"It must be because you're really beginning to resemble a man," was the malicious reply.

Conny did not seem as important to him as on the previous summer until she left for a Massachusetts resort with her aunt, Trevor accompanying them.

"Say, Conny, come back!" Lenny wrote her. "It's gotten so lonely all of a sudden, that I stop in front of your house every time I pass, and whistle to make believe you're there. Not that I haven't plenty to do. But here's mother gone, and you. The housekeeper is all the company I have for meals. Her brilliant 'yes' and 'no' in conversation wears on me. Once in a while I invite somebody down. Mother keeps urging me to get away. But the league won't let me. And I've found that when a fellow wants something done, the best thing is for him to do it himself."

Instead of herself praising his devotion to the Germantown boys, Conny let him see how she felt by merely repeating what her uncle said in praise of it. Lenny was hugely pleased. Later, Conny spoke of the odd way in which her uncle had begun to keep to his room. The reason for this did not lie in the coolness Gertrude displayed when in his presence. An incident had occurred which had frightened Trevor.

It began when he discovered that a theatrical manager he had known in former years was stopping at a neighboring hotel. For a while Trevor hid his anxiety from Gertrude. But there came a time when this was no longer possible. The manager passed him on an unfrequented path—which Trevor had purposely chosen in the hope of

escaping this encounter—and had caught sight of the actor's half averted face.

He called at once after the rapidly moving figure.

"I say, Trevor! Trevor!"

Finding that the tall figure would neither turn nor halt, the manager stood perplexed for a moment, ready to believe himself mistaken. But the temptation to have another look at the familiar face was too much for him. He rapidly caught up with Trevor, and touched him on the arm.

The actor's past training now stood him in good stead. He contorted his face out of semblance to itself, and easily looked eighty when he turned.

"I beg your pardon," said the manager, somewhat bewildered. "I thought you were one Robert Trevor. As it is, you resemble him—although he would be a younger man."

"My name is not Craven, sir. No, sir," came in a squeaky voice.

The manager apologized, and went on his way. Trevor hurried tremblingly to his hotel, in a very troubled frame of mind. Seeking out Gertrude, he asked to have a few moments with her, and told her what had happened. When she spoke, it was to say:

"Perhaps you might go to some other resort for a few weeks. This man is not likely to stay here long."

Trevor could not hide how he felt about this threatening separation from Conny. As he stammered some words of agreement with what Gertrude advised, she, filled with pity for his distress, said:

"After all, there may be no reason for alarm. There are many striking resemblances in this world, and he will really believe he made a mistake."

"I shall take care not to encounter him again," said Trevor, sternly, as if it would be a crime to do so.

Gertrude let the matter drop at this point. But as she saw how severely Trevor was inclined to deal with himself, she stood ready to admit that his punishment had been sufficient, and that they should no longer seek to prolong it.

"I believe he is sincere," she told herself. "But should I not wait a little longer? There is too much at stake. Not that he is playing a part. Still, there is Conny's money; and, besides, he might be tempted by the chance of separating her from me."

She was sorry for this mistrust of Trevor. She felt that she would have been less inclined to it if Conny were stronger-minded.

"If I died," Gertrude reflected, "and if by some chance Trevor's nervousness should make him irresponsible or less kind, who would stand between him and Conny?"

So Gertrude stiffened herself against the carelessness with which she had come to regard the actor. He was too troubled by his encounter with the manager to notice this. He now wore his glasses at all times to give him an aged appearance, although for two weeks he hardly ventured out of his room. When Conny complained of his shut-in life to Gertrude, the reply was:

"He most likely prefers it, even if he has given no reason. You ought to understand that there are lots of things we do not explain. Oh, how young you are!"

"Well, there are very few things, aunt, that he doesn't explain to me!" said Conny, surprised at her aunt's impatience.

In her next letter to Lenny, Conny wrote:

"Do you know what I've been thinking and thinking about? That when aunt gets married—and I guess it isn't

hard to guess who the lucky man will be!—and when I come into my property, I am going to have a pretty home of my own! And uncle is going to sit at the head of the table to carve, and boss! I tell you, he's glorious!"

From Germantown came in a hurried scrawl:

"Count on me for a carving set when you start your establishment. But the day you come into your money, a slice of it is going to the league! Oh, yes, it will always be needing things! There are new kids growing up all the time, you know.

"Say," went on the letter, "you ought to see how the league is licking everything it tackles around Philadelphia. A couple of high school fellows joined. I wasn't in favor of that kind of thing at first. But they're not snobbish, and it sort of helps along. And when it comes to yelling at the umpire, I guess the high school fellows are no better than the others. Justin Mahan has been doing a lot of coaching. I am going to join mother for a week. No more than that! Am reading all the time so as to drop right in on study in September."

He did not tell Conny that he was badly in need of the week's rest he was to take. He would have gone earlier except that he knew his smoking would have to be lessened when he was near his mother. When the latter saw his tired face and nervous manner, that week became two.

On his return to the city he found the clubs of the league in a wrangle over the question of charging admission to the more important games. The idea was prompted by the wish to secure additional funds for the erection of the club-house.

Lenny lined up with the opposition.

"No matter how low an admission you charge," he argued, "you will keep out the people who enjoy seeing you

play—your own folks. You want the crowd, and not the very few who think they do you a favor by coming to the games. We are getting the money we need about as fast as we expected to get it—and a little faster. You will do more by making the game popular than by giving it an appearance of professional baseball. And if you sat down and figured out how much you would make by charging admission, you'd find it wasn't worth while!"

The final vote supported Lenny's contention. When he was on the way home, some one slapped him on the back and cried:

"Good boy! You've got the right idea!"

"I didn't know you were there, Mr. Mahan," said Lenny, coloring like a girl. "Strange I didn't see you!"

"I was, though. And I heard you. The idea of hiring enclosed fields and charging an admission was really out of spirit with what they should be after. It was certain to lead to wrangling, in time. You were right, too, about their having their own people instead of toadying to those who have money—even if it means us," Mahan said with a smile. Then he hastened to correct himself. "No, not exactly us, I suppose—but our friends who drop in at the end of summer, and 'Oh!' and 'Ah!' over the thing. Still," he added, smiling again, "you sounded dangerously like a demagogue when you set those fellows against aristocrats who could afford five and ten cents to witness a game."

"I know it is a small sum——" began Lenny.

"It's all right! I understand! I must have my joke, you know!" said Mahan. "Of course you were looking out for the principle of the thing! That's what makes me hope you won't be a politician."

"Oh, I've got to get to Congress some time!" Lenny laughingly replied.

"As if I didn't know why you started the baseball league!" said Mahan.

"That's why I'm going to start as a law freshman next year, too! But suppose you come and have dinner with me in my loneliness this evening, and we'll talk politics—or rather, you'll talk it."

Justin accepted the invitation, much to Lenny's joy; and as they walked on and chatted, there sang through that boy's veins:

"You and I, Justin Mahan, are going in for team work in law in a few years! In a few years!"

And Lenny's voice deepened as he conversed. He was slower in making replies, as if he wished to weigh what he said. His eyes were full of seriousness. His stride was measured. And altogether he seemed to have aged five years in as many minutes.

The thing which struck Justin, and of which he spoke in his next letter to Gertrude, was the increasing resemblance of Lenny to his father.

"He is Captain Craigie to the life," Justin wrote. "You know how I fairly worshiped the Captain; so all his mannerisms stuck in my memory. And here is Lenny with the same boundless energy, the same restlessness, the same habit of throwing back his head during excitement, the same quick, sharp laugh, the same sudden moodiness. Every expression of his face brings back the Captain, although I was but a boy when the Captain died. How a boy's mind will fix memories for all time! As for Lenny, let us hope that no calamity of inaction will fret him to death as it did the Captain."

That sort of inaction was far removed from Lenny's daily existence. Every moment of his time was fully occupied. To get money for the clubhouse, he interviewed

storekeepers and politicians, professional men and real estate dealers, and whatever well-to-do women happened to be in Germantown during the warm weather. He was not content to rest with a plea for support. He urged upon those whom he tried to interest that they should come to the ball games.

One of the business men he approached tried to cut him short by saying:

"And so you believe people will care to listen to a boy, eh? Some of them may. But what you had better do is to turn over this collection of funds to a committee of men who have standing in the community. You can't have gotten very much."

Lenny began his reply by bringing out a formidable list of names and contributions. When the astonished man had studied these for several moments, Lenny said:

"It's only right that a boy should do it, for he knows just what a boy wants. He certainly needs a clubhouse, just like a man, especially those fellows who haven't attractive homes. You've seen them standing around corners on winter evenings, or in cigar-stores, because there were no other places to go to. And we're after an athletic club. It would be partly run by the boys themselves. Many boys' clubs don't succeed because they're sort of 'hand-me-down' affairs. Why, the more I think of it, the more I wonder how the boys ever did without the club we have in mind!"

This was his line of argument; and because of the backing he had received at the start, the club ceased to be merely "in the air." His mother had difficulty in getting him away to the seashore again for two more weeks before the season ended. During this fortnight, he spent half of his time in writing letters to people in Germantown about the

league. It was then that his mother found him doing considerable smoking. She was frightened.

"You never told me!" she said.

"Well, you see, when I am busy I haven't much desire to smoke," he said. "That's the reason I wanted to get back to Germantown as fast as I could."

Mrs. Craigie was thunderstruck.

"Why, you speak like a confirmed cigarette-smoker!" she cried.

"Oh, no, mother!" he replied. "I do indulge occasionally. But if I thought it was getting any hold on me, don't you think I would come to you and tell you?"

"Would you, Lenny?" she asked, almost pleadingly.

"Of course," he said, putting his arm about her. "But it's all because I'm restless and not working. Now that I've promised to stay the two weeks, I will. But I'm anxious to get back. You have no idea how much! Even though I feel bad about leaving you. What fun to think of being near you while I am tutoring!"

"You promise never to hold back anything from me that concerns your well-being?" his mother asked.

"I promise, mamsy. Whom else could I go to?"

After this when he wished to smoke, he took care to be out of her way. It was one of the reasons why he was happy at last to get back to Germantown. There the needs of the league once more absorbed him. When his mother returned, she discovered that he was but little inclined to talk about a tutor. He was full of the clubhouse project from the very moment she crossed the threshold.

She cast about for some means of bringing back his interest in his tutoring, for she did not wish to humiliate him by pointing out that he had ceased to care. A happy

thought struck her. She decided to ask Justin Mahan to engage Lenny in a long talk about his future law work.

The result was what she had expected. In a week Lenny was clamoring for a tutor. In another week he was under the wing of one. It was not without great hesitancy that he allowed his clubhouse project to pass into the hands of a committee of Germantown citizens. He only turned over his lists of names and promised sums of money after he had seen Justin Mahan elected head of this committee.

Then, satisfied with the wide newspaper publicity which had come to the league, and certain of its future, he was ready to give his entire attention to his work.

"It's to be 'Mahan and Craigie'!" he kept repeating when he encountered difficulties in his studies.

An additional impulse to get on was to come from a visit to Conny and the actor. Maur had just left Trevor's rooms; and as Lenny settled himself comfortably for a chat, he found Conny's uncle still under the spell of that boy's visit.

"I am amazed at his energy," said the actor. "I have never seen a youth who builded so confidently. And it is more than conceit. He has a sure hold upon himself, and he will succeed. But I do not like his too intimate knowledge of the world. He ought not to have it at his age. When he takes on that air of worldliness, I am saddened. He has changed greatly in the last year!"

"He will certainly succeed," said Lenny.

"I told him he should not give up the idea of going to college," the actor went on. "But he believes that he would not profit by it. He thinks a man should fall on his feet early. I did not wish to tell him that we were talking about boys."

Lenny was tempted to laugh, but did not, lest it should

appear that he was enjoying the joke because it was at Maur's expense.

"He spoke," Trevor said, "of how he astounded his father with his knowledge of the stock-market. He must be a hard worker. Ah, success is in the blood!"

For once the actor's talk irritated Lenny. But he mastered his jealousy, and rose to the occasion.

"Bob Maur has grit," he said. "He must have had a tussle with himself about not going to college, where he would have shone in athletics. They would have made much of him there. But when he sets his mind on anything, nothing else counts, and he can stand a great deal."

"Even me," said Trevor with a laugh. "I know he tolerates me because of Conny. I suppose I mustn't bear him a grudge for that."

As Lenny turned to see what effect these words had upon Conny, there suddenly and startlingly dawned upon that boy's mind a reason for Maur's great ambition. It was Conny that Maur wanted! And knowing his bulldog determination, Lenny felt that Maur would keep on until Conny found that she preferred him to any one else, and would not be able to do without him.

"Why, what is the matter? You look frightened!" cried Conny.

"Frightened? What about?" asked Lenny with a forced laugh.

Then he found an excuse for getting hurriedly away, so he could think matters over. Boy though he was, he saw clearly that Conny's present likes and dislikes would not be her future ones. And even Maur might change.

At once Lenny began to consider how he might fight the latter's influence. Lenny had no thought of regarding his girl friend in a more serious light than heretofore. His

entire object was to defeat Maur because he did not believe him worthy of Conny.

No sooner did he come to this conclusion than it colored everything he did. He went at his lessons energetically, and was not at all frightened when his tutor pointed out that the year would have to be a strenuous one if he expected to enter the law school the following fall without conditions.

Working in the midst of his home surroundings, he got more out of his books than at the academy. By dint of mighty effort, he partly overcame the poor memory with which he had been troubled during the previous year. When the tendency to sit back and idle would come on, he would picture Maur happy with many tasks at his father's brokerage office; and it sufficed to set Lenny going again.

As a consequence of his arduous application, he went out but little, and when he had leisure he planned the interior of the boys' clubhouse. Conny took him to task more than once for the too few visits he paid her.

"But I'm trying to be somebody!" he said. "Can't you see that I've got to be up and doing, or I'll be left behind by—everybody?" "By Maur" was on the tip of his tongue, but he checked himself in time. "And you know my reason for hustling. I've got to be good enough to be worthy of becoming Justin Mahan's partner. I've told you that before——"

"But now I know you mean it!" cried Conny exultantly. "Isn't it glorious to stop thinking about things, and to begin doing them!"

"So you mustn't mind if I don't come often," Lenny urged.

"But you do get out for walks! Didn't your mother tell me?" Conny tripped him up.

"Well, I like to moon by myself," Lenny said weakly.

"Just to smoke—and to pretend you're thinking!" Then seeing that he was hurt, Conny cried, "Say, isn't it fine to be working where your dad spent so much time? No wonder you have such big ambitions!"

"Yes, it is fine," said Lenny simply.

He did not tell her that there were times when he had the feeling of his father's presence hovering over the room. It grew to be a conviction, but it brought no fears in its train. He had but to study the portrait of the hero with eagerness to evoke this feeling. So there was an additional prompting for hard work.

The tutor was all praise. And Mrs. Craigie saw Lenny's application with a thrill similar to the one which had shaken her when she received the news of her husband's heroism on the Niagara. But Lenny was finding the strain a little too great, although he did not give any sign of it. Soon he began to dwell on the relief Christmas week would bring. His mother insisted, when that time came, that the week should be lengthened to two. It was stretched into four, because during the second week he grew suddenly ill.

There was no hurt anywhere; just a general collapse. He put his case thus to the doctor when his mother was out of earshot: "I feel as if I could rest forever. I never thought there was that kind of a quit to me!"

During these four weeks Lenny's ambition was like the smoky flame of a lamp whose oil has been burned away. Several times there was this question on the tip of his tongue: "Doctor, do you think the cigarettes did it?" But since the physician spoke only of his overwork, and did not at all mention the smoking, Lenny felt that the question would be ridiculous.

"Why should it be cigarettes?" he asked.

His mother crushed down the fears which assailed her, and tried to lighten his hours. Conny came to cheer him, and to read to him. Justin brought him the news of the latest increases in the clubhouse funds. Finally a visitor appeared whose coming made Lenny stare with wide-open eyes, his mouth agape. It was Bob Maur. Lenny was almost speechless when the visitor extended his hand.

"Heard you were laid up, old man," said Maur in the most composed of voices. "But I thought it wouldn't hurt if we had a talk. I'm deuced sorry to see you down."

Despite this seeming display of friendship, Lenny could have taken his oath that Maur had come to gloat secretly over his breakdown. Although Lenny tried to overcome this feeling of distrust, he could not.

Bob Maur was saying, "I want to see more of you when you get up. It's foolish for us not to get together. Scraps might have been all right when we were kids, but I guess there isn't anything more to scrap about!"

With one mighty effort, Lenny flung away his suspicions, and accepted Maur's visit as if it had come from an old friend.

"If I get the time we shall certainly see more of each other," he said. "I'll be up soon. Those law school exams have to be passed this fall, and I'm tired of being an invalid!"

Lenny suddenly felt while he was talking that he was being studied in a far from sympathetic way. But he took himself to task again.

"Why, Maur may have the best intentions in the world in coming here!" he mentally exclaimed.

It happened, however, that the visitor's thoughts ran somewhat thus:

"You aren't going to enter the law school in a hurry! Nor set the world on fire! How can anybody take you seriously? Conny will soon see what a failure you are, and will be done with you!"

Outwardly Maur was cordiality itself, and wanted to know all about Lenny's preparations for the "exams." In return he spoke of his intention of entering a large brokerage firm in New York, where he would profit by being close to Wall Street.

"No amateur stunts for me!" he declared. "I want to get close to the men doing the big things! We're slow in Philadelphia. I'm the sort of man who's not satisfied with half a loaf. And I like a good big fight! Even if I am young, I won't be awfully handicapped, because there's a bunch of money coming to me soon. Queer, isn't it, the way we were kids at school?"

At once they were busy reviving academy days. Before leaving, Maur showed his interest in the league clubhouse by speaking of the way it had endeared Lenny to the boys in Germantown.

"Oh, I guess the whole thing has done as much for me as I have done for it!" was the reply of the boy propped up in bed. "When a fellow gets useful, it gives him more confidence in himself. We've certainly had a bully afternoon, haven't we?"

"We'll have another one pretty soon," said Maur, with a warm shake of Lenny's hand.

When he had gone, Lenny was sorry that his mother had not been at home to listen to the talk.

"*She* would have known right away whether he was sincere or not!" he was certain.

He was amused to think that not once had Conny's name been mentioned. Then he set his jaws, and his eyes glowed

as the determination to succeed surged through him with new force. The presence of Maur had aroused him from his lassitude. It was not the visitor's show of friendship which had stirred him; it was Maur's air of assurance, his energy, and his plans.

"I am going to get out of bed this week," Lenny said to his mother when she appeared. "I've got work in my bones, and it's time I quit lying here! Don't be afraid that I'll overdo it. But you see, when I'm doing nothing I only worry!"

And he had his way, although he got into harness again rather slowly, out of deference to his mother's wishes. His decision, "The law school this fall, or bust!" was only for Conny's ears. When his mother pleaded that he should not be in haste, he said, "If you only knew how naturally lazy I was, you wouldn't worry a minute!"

Mrs. Craigie's great grief was that he did not have a physique which would tide him over exacting periods. Despite her belief in useful people, she would have been satisfied if he had fallen back on a less trying profession than law. Remembering the high marks Lenny had won for essay writing, she had an ambition that he should write books; and she would have been happy in this, even if he never won fame or place.

But she recognized that his nature loved contest, and that law would somewhat satisfy his restlessness. Where his father had sought for the chance to conquer on the seas, Lenny would seek to do the same on land. To his mother there was terrible pathos in his having inherited this love of struggle in a weak body.

Without having had any reason for doing so, she resigned the idea that he would ever give himself to excessive smoking. As she watched him, she came to believe that she

had put too much blame on the cigarette for her husband's tragic end. In both his case and Lenny's it appeared that ambitious souls had been planted in unambitious bodies. She prayed for strength for her son; and she prayed for strength for herself, that she might be of use to him.

It did not take long for Lenny to guess the troubled state of his mother's mind. He began to seek ways of lessening it. When he felt moody, he hid the fact. He hid his weariness. He laughed when he was far from inclined to do so, and tried always to bring her a cheerful countenance. More than this, he never argued with her when she offered advice, much as he always differed with others. When he found himself worn out after a stretch of hard study, he would take himself out of the house rather than risk showing his excessive tiredness.

All this proved a nervous strain on his mind and body. But he schooled himself against it. "I am not a boy any longer, and I must get a grip on myself!" he kept saying.

Because of the fact that he did not believe himself a boy any longer, he entered into a humorous exchange of words with his mother on what he considered an important issue. This was after she had called him "Lenny" before some visitors. On their departure, he said:

"You'll think I'm queer, mother. But won't you please call me Leonard from now on?"

"Of all things!" she exclaimed, taken aback. "What has gotten over you?"

"I wish you would," he pleaded. "There's a kid sound about 'Lenny' that makes folks smile. It's as bad as 'Willy.' I remember when Will Burchell was at the academy during my first year there. A chum of his on the campus yelled, 'O Willy!' up to his room. Well, every fellow at the academy had his head out of a window in a min-

ute, and there was a roar of 'O Willy!' You could have heard it a mile. Burchell pulled in his head as if he had been shot. Talk about being mad! Of course, they didn't try to kid him about it, for he had his full growth—six feet in his stockings—and had a fist like a Belgian block. Let's try Leonard, mother."

She yielded, although reluctant to surrender a name she had used from his babyhood days. Conny was less tractable. She suggested, with a roguish tilt of her head, "Lenno," and decided to make it Len.

"Len it is then," said the boy concerned. "But Lenny is taboo. If you make it Leonard, I'll forgive you for that 'Lenno'."

But Conny wanted at least a week to think the change over, with the right to "Lenny" him in the meantime to her heart's content.

"I guess I won't be around for that week," he said.

"If you don't, I'll call you 'Lenny' until you're old enough to be in your second childhood again!" she warned him.

"Oh, you're a shrew, and no mistake!" said Lenny with a sigh.

He had time for only one visit during that week. The briefness of his stay did not allow him to escape the stream of "Lennys" she hurled at him. He stood it heroically for a while. Then he began to roll "Con-stance" off his tongue with a solemn air, and with telling effect, for Conny hauled down her colors at once.

Most people now called him Leonard. At first the novelty of this pleased him. But there were other things to absorb his attention. The year of preparation for college was going rather fast. Spring, the period of his first entrance examinations, hove into sight at an alarming rate,

before Lenny was ready to admit that the time for the test was actually at hand.

Justin, whom he encountered just before the examinations, noted the lifeless eyes and the tense face which Lenny had masked before his mother.

"Heigh ho, man!" cried the attorney. "You're overdoing it! You'd better pull up!"

"Do I look it?" asked Lenny. "Well, I guess it's a case of too much midnight oil. But it will be over soon. The work was a little tougher than I expected. Once I've passed the harder subjects, I won't have so much to think about this summer. Then I'll take a long rest. Have you got a cigarette?"

"Nice question for a man in mental training to put!" laughed Justin.

"I guess you've got to keep fit as a fiddle yourself, and I've never seen you without your cigarettes!" Lenny got back at him.

"That point counts for you! But really it's rot about the harm of smoking!" said Justin, as he handed him a cigarette. "It's hard work that does one up, not a few whiffs of this little white friend of ours. You talk about exams, Leonard! Why, I never quit having them! They're cropping up for me in one form or another all the time. But I'm not going to preach. Say, I've a notion to get up a crack non-professional baseball team this summer, and to tour the country with it, in a series of exhibition games."

"Wouldn't that be splendid!" cried Lenny, his eyes glowing.

"It might be if I had the time. But our boy-days are the only leisure ones we ever get. Turn the affairs of the league this summer over to somebody else, Leonard, and

do rest up," was Justin's parting admonition as he held out his hand.

"Oh, it will be fun to live and dream baseball after the long nightmares of exams!" was Lenny's reply.

He hailed the first day of the trials with relief. Although he entered the class-room a little nervously, he was certain about his subject. After he read the algebraic questions on the paper handed to him, he was startled to find his mind a complete blank about the means of solving the problems.

He sat stunned. Then he waited fearfully for his memory to right itself. Thinking that his new surroundings had unduly upset him, he lolled back and tried to be at ease. But a renewed attempt at work proved futile.

"What can be the matter with me?" he gasped, the perspiration in beads on his forehead.

He went at the questions like a madman. Everything came wrong, even the easiest of the problems. Finally, when he looked at his watch, he saw that no matter how quickly and surely he might now work, there was no hope for his finishing in time.

Getting dully out of his seat, he left the room, ignoring the look of surprise of the instructor, who had expected a paper from him. On the train home, he studied the examination questions. As he saw how they could have been solved, tears of mortification sprang to his eyes. He angrily brushed them away.

"How can I tell her? How can I tell her?" he kept repeating, as he pictured his mother standing on the porch, eager for news of what he had done. "Won't she be frightened?" he asked himself.

As he hopelessly watched the streets of Philadelphia change into those of Germantown, there flashed through

his mind the possibility of saving his mother from grief by telling her a lie. At once he was in the turmoil of a struggle with his conscience. The arrival of the train at his station decided him in favor of the lie.

So he said that he had been mistaken about the hour of the examination, and had come too late. He wound up by cheerfully declaring:

"I'll pass that subject in fall, never fear! It isn't as if I had failed. I've got the algebra down pat! So there won't be much about it to study again."

Happy that he had not taken the mistake too much to heart, his mother readily agreed with him that there was no cause for worry. He decamped as quickly as possible, flying desperately to the subject which would come up on the next day.

With it he fared better in the test. History was the topic, and he answered all the questions in full. But during the examinations which followed, the outcome was a blow to him. Three more subjects than he had counted upon would have to be carried into the fall for another trial.

No one but his mother knew of this. His humiliation was bitter. When his mother pleaded with him to put off his entrance to college for a year, he cried:

"Oh, I couldn't now! I've set all my hopes on going this fall. After all, mother, even if I don't pass everything then, I can carry a few 'conditions' for a little while. A year of law would mean a great deal to me. I'll study three hours every day this summer, so that I'll enter without any conditions at all!"

He only had his way when he agreed that for that summer at least he would not devote any time to the league,

but would go to some quiet resort where a tutor would help him over difficulties, and where there would be a chance both to rest and work.

Lenny was puzzled to understand why he had failed "to come up to the mark" in his studies, since in former years the same amount of application would have carried everything before it. His spells of weakness also gave him concern.

"They always said I had ability," he kept telling himself. "But now, when I need it most, I haven't any!"

During the summer, Justin, who had virtually taken charge of the league, kept him informed of all its doings.

"We're the talk for miles around," he wrote. "Challenges are coming from every direction."

Whimsical letters from Conny filled in many of Leonard's leisure moments. They often recalled the days when he and Conny were children together. In the lonely moments which visited him every now and then, he would admit that he needed her very much. A letter which she treasured read as follows:

It's all right to talk about a smoke. And gab with a man may be good. But give me Us, Conny, Us! You are one of the few people I have endless time for. So when your letter don't turn up when I expect it, there's an awful silence.

Of course, I meet girls here. But, oh! And again, oh! Your uncle always speaks about holding up a mirror to nature. I don't think the girls here would have time to make any such spare use of their mirrors.

Why were you born a girl? Just think of the fine tomboy you were when we were kids together. Not that you've altogether outgrown it! But I get the creeps sometimes thinking you might. It leaves me with a feeling as if I had been put on a raft in the middle of the ocean.

I often think of the nuisance you were when you wanted to go along with the fellows. You couldn't have been higher than two feet then. The fellows did certainly hate you. It makes me laugh to remember the time you fell into that

drinking trough for horses. Oh, Miss Constance, you were a sight when we got you out!

I wonder whether I ever bore you. I puzzle even myself at times. Ever do that? Don't! It makes me think of a kitten chasing after its own tail.

Think of me plenty. I believe I'd know if you stopped. That's one of the ghost feelings I have. Oh, I'm a wizard! But an awfully sleepy one just now. So good-night.

Although Conny knew that his friendship for her was strong and sincere, she did not dream that her letters often urged him on in his work when he was tempted to stop.

There was some one else to whom letters from her proved encouraging. This was Bob Maur, who was putting in his whole summer with a brokerage house in New York. He took care to let her know that without an occasional word from her, he would not be able to apply himself so uncomplainingly to his work.

"If I get where I want (and I don't see any reason why I will not), I'll have you to thank for it!" he wrote.

CHAPTER X

JUSTIN received a letter from Gertrude during August, saying that she intended to come home sooner than she had planned. She was brief, and gave him no clue to the reason for this move, greatly to his bewilderment.

"Whatever may have prompted her to do it, 'it is an ill wind that doesn't blow somebody good'!" he reflected. "When she is away from me it is not as if I were near her and influencing her."

With Gertrude came Conny and Trevor. Justin took them home from the station, surprised that Gertrude kept her face averted during the ride. Once at the house, Conny scurried to her uncle's room to see that he was made comfortable. Gertrude led Justin into the spacy library, which was shaded to keep out the summer heat.

"I can't understand why you should have returned in the awful torrid weather we are having!" Justin began when Gertrude remained silent.

"Were *you* not braving it, and working in it?" came almost timidly.

Justin was dazed for a moment.

"I?" he murmured. "Why, it was necessary for me to be here! But you!"

He waited for some real explanation of her early return. None seemed forthcoming. At a stride he was at her side, and leaning over her chair.

"Is it possible that you are here because—because—of—me?" he asked, almost halted by the sound of his own voice.

She looked up at last, and said quietly, though with a tremor in her voice:

"For several weeks I tried to bear being alone. But I needed you too much. You remember those short, halting letters of which you could make nothing? My being away from you, dear, was getting to be unbearable. And now—and now——"

Justin folded her into his arms.

"Life has begun to mean something tangible and something grand for me!" he said at last.

"Oh, you knew I would come to you soon! Why, everybody was waiting for me to do this," Gertrude told him with a smile, although there were tears in her eyes.

The Germantown residents, when they returned from the resorts, learned of the engagement without manifesting any surprise, although a goodly number of prominent young men mourned the news. To Mrs. Craigie and Lenny particularly it was full of satisfaction. The latter, however, was too busy to say more than, "Oh, I knew it would happen!"—for the fall examinations were ahead.

A furious last moment spurt carried him into the law school. Failure in two subjects kept the victory from being complete. In order to remain a law student, he would have to pass these subjects before spring.

This did not trouble Lenny as much as the new method of instruction he encountered. Instead of daily recitations, he attended lectures, at which many courses of reading were mapped out.

Worried by the possibility of not being able to keep pace with these courses, he took his difficulties to Justin, who bore him away to lunch to talk matters over.

"Although I'm awfully glad you're not to have as much time to spare as before," said Lenny, to show how he felt about Justin's engagement, "I won't be sorry to use some of it."

"Ah, my boy, don't you know that when a fellow gets a thing off his mind, he has more time than ever?" said the happy man in a burst of joyous confidence. "So you're to come down every day, and ask all the questions you want. You're perfectly right not to be groping about. I don't believe it always helps to throw a fellow upon his own resources when he is learning the a-b-c of anything."

During the many hours and half-hours they spent together, Justin was somewhat surprised to discover the amount of smoking Lenny did. The older man said nothing about this, as he considered it hypocrisy to take Lenny to task for something which he was himself doing. He saw that when Lenny was not indulging in cigarettes he was restless.

The latter spoke to his mother enthusiastically of Justin's patience, kindness and unlimited good nature.

"You think he's a very fortunate man to win Gertrude Breen, don't you?" he said. "Let me tell you, she's just as fortunate!"

Although Lenny found himself less bewildered now in his study of law, because of Justin's help, he was having a great deal of trouble to memorize the work laid out for him. He also had to combat periods of lassitude, when his inclination was to throw books aside and to be careless about the consequences.

He could not understand this. Nor did it at first give him much concern, because pressure, in the shape of recitations, was not being applied. But his habit of putting things off began to fill him with worry as examination

period rolled around again after what appeared to be a very short year. Justin's help, it was true, had been fortunate in certain directions. It could not, however, entirely take the place of study.

As spring came, Lenny saw with fear a likelihood of his failing completely in the trials for promotion. Going to Justin, he confessed his state of mind. Justin was surprised and puzzled.

"You certainly worked very hard!" he said.

"I am not sure that I did, now that I see what a mess I have made of it," was Lenny's honest statement of the case.

"You don't mean that you deliberately wasted your time!" exclaimed Justin.

"I don't really know what happened. Something was wrong! I don't know whether it was my fault. You know I haven't any vices, and I don't dissipate. I assure you I don't!" Lenny said. "Yet I can't concentrate, I can't make facts stick in my memory, and I haven't the vim I once had. Oh, I knew all along that the failure would accumulate! It sort of made me ashamed of myself. I cut out visiting Conny and other people, thinking that if I stayed at home I would get lots of work done. What the dickens do you think is the matter with me? Have I got a yellow streak?"

"Why, no! Of course not!" said Justin. "I think I understand now. It brings me back to my first year at college. At the start I got an attack of something like stage-fright. Things went against me all the time. I blundered fearfully in recitations. I got behind in my work. And I found everything going wrong. It made me mad clean through; so I put the brakes on that downhill slide. But although I got a grip on myself, it took

fearfully hard work to keep from losing a year. The start had been wrong, you see. Now your case may be similar. The academy was no sort of preparation, and you got at your law in a timorous frame of mind."

"Yes, it's something like that!" said Lenny. "What would you advise?"

"That you take the year over again," said Justin; and was immediately sorry he had spoken as he saw Lenny's head fall miserably on his breast. "Go up for the examinations, though," Justin suggested. "It's the sort of experience you need. Come, you're a young chap; and you'll be studying law, anyhow, for some time after you graduate. We never quit. Why are you so bent on doing the course in exactly the three years laid out by the college, anyhow?"

"Because most of the fellows will do it in that time," said Lenny. "And I hate to lose a year! The thought fairly upsets me!"

"But those three years are only a sort of average," Justin argued. "Any professor you've been with would advise you to make it four. Take the whole four, and consider yourself lucky that you are young enough to be able to do so, and have the money. But by all means go up for the exams. Even if you don't pass in all the subjects, it's an education to tussle with examination papers for a couple of hours."

"Yes, I'll take them all!" Lenny said.

"Good! And if you can stand any more advice from me, use all your summer to rest up in," Justin urged. "Don't open a book for the four months. Never mind about your haste to become a Judge.—You don't mind my preaching, do you?"

"Certainly not!" replied Lenny. "But," he added with

a smile, "it wouldn't be a bad idea if *you* took a couple of months off!"

Justin flicked the ashes from the end of his cigarette, and looked thoughtfully at the speaker.

"I don't know but what you're right," he said. "But I simply can't get the time!" He spoke regretfully. As Lenny arose to go, Justin told him, "Old man, I believe in your ultimate big success. I think you will get all you want. But take your time. Never mind about not getting through college on schedule time. Ten years from now it won't make a bit of difference!"

Lenny's face flushed with pleasure when he left the office. But Justin was far from happy.

"By George!" he was saying in a low voice, "all the troubles which have beset Lenny seem almost a repetition of mine!" He got to his feet, and began to pace the floor. "No energy, no power of concentration—nothing! And yet I didn't start with that frail physique of his. I had muscles to burn! Strange! Everything has come topsy-turvy!"

He began to reconsider what he ought to do about leaving the firm with which he was practicing. It was not a new subject of discussion. The two partners of the firm seemed to be ignoring him, and the chance of his soon being made one of them looked slim.

"Oh, I will get out for myself!" he told Gertrude that evening. "I must start on my own hook! They'll never make a partner of me. They have no use for young blood. Do you know, I have an idea that they're beginning to consider me a failure!"

"Impossible! Impossible!" cried Gertrude. "You must be patient! And I would rather you gave up all your time to law, and did not bother about politics. That is taking

your time from work in the office. It is handicapping you."

"Oh, I must do both, and do them well!" he replied. "You surely don't think I'm a weakling! If you hadn't discouraged my intended fight against the ward bosses, I would have scored heavily, dear. As it is, I must be patient while other men are climbing over my head! Fight is the keynote of politics!"

"But you know what your support would have been in that fight!" Gertrude reminded him.

He had nothing to say. The fact was that in seeking to band together the younger men of the ward who were disgruntled with the party leaders, he had been somewhat unfortunate. He had turned to men who were discredited among the better people of Germantown. In most cases they had money, which would have been valuable in financing the fight. But when he asked Gertrude to receive them in her house, she raised her hands in horror.

"Why, you know what I think of Lucas Clifton and the rest, dear!" she said. "Do give up this revolt against the bosses until you are stronger in the ward! Your battle is half won if you have a fine following."

But Justin, who had been losing friends of late, rather than making them, because of his general unrest and impatience, could not allow his plans to be overridden like this.

"Why can't you be tolerant about Clifton?" he asked.

"You know why, Justin," she said. "He is untrustworthy. What is his pretence of practicing law, if not a plan to stand in well with his grandfather, to get his money when he dies?"

"But if I'm to succeed in a big way, and at once, how can I afford to spend my time questioning each man's mo-

tives?" asked Justin. "I must gather what elements I can. When I have succeeded, I can discard the untrustworthy ones. I must make use of men like Clifton and Pierce."

"Pierce, the gambler! How can you?" Gertrude asked, amazed. "Surely you can wait if you are determined to build up a strong reform movement! You must have friends at your side, not cast-offs!"

"And be betrayed by one's friends!" he exclaimed. "I tell you, my eyes have been opened of late! I have found that men upon whom I banked have proved treacherous. Why am I being neglected? No, I will not wait for these so-called good friends! I will build up a following of my own!"

He was to mistrust that following when Lucas Clifton in an unsober moment at a café spoke slightingly of Gertrude in his hearing. There was the impact of a fist against a jaw, and the half-drunken Clifton measured his length on the floor. Only the interference of bystanders kept Justin from giving the offender a severe thrashing.

That blow effectively knocked out Justin's hopes for a new political party. His career in politics was saved only because of Clifton's fear that if he told the ward leaders about Mahan's intentions, he would have to explain why he was so ready to help him.

Justin used every means to keep what had taken place in the café from reaching Gertrude's ears. It got there, nevertheless, in a roundabout way. Gertrude, horrified, refused to see Justin for a week, and finally fled to Atlantic City. He followed her, and when she saw his half-crazed appearance, she relented.

"I think," she said, "that you have been sufficiently punished."

"I think so," he said humbly. Then with flashing eyes, he added, "Never will I disappoint you again! The lesson has cost me too dear!"

He tried to atone by feverish application to his law practice, and he stuck to his resolution to work sixteen hours a day, although this often kept him from seeing Gertrude. But despite the fearful strain of the work, all he told Gertrude was:

"Somehow, I cannot get enough sleep. It reminds me of my growing years when I used to fairly cry when morning came and I had to get out of bed."

Left orphaned when a child, he had been under the care of a severe guardian, who believed in sternly rearing young people. Justin used to relate:

"When I was at last sent away from home to boarding school, it merely served me as a place for sleep. I used to fairly revel in the chance of getting up late. I got quite a reputation for it. And even to-day, the very thought of the early risings to which I was subjected when 'Guardy' had me in tow almost tempts me to drowse off."

He saw Lenny the day the latter went up for the first of his examinations for promotion. Lenny was in need of a word of encouragement from someone who knew of his troubles, and before whom he could honestly speak his mind. He had hidden from his mother the fact that he was going up to the examinations in a hopeless frame of mind.

"That's what hurts worse than anything else!" he frankly told Justin. "Oh, haven't I made a mess of everything!"

"You'll go to her in the end; so it will be all right," said Justin soothingly. "When I was in trouble, I never had

any mother to go to, you know." He shrugged his shoulders to suppress a sigh.

"Maybe you think it is easy to bring her that sort of thing!" Lenny grieved.

"There you go again!" scolded Justin. "Why, none of us will feel any differently about you because you are going to take the year over again. Come! Be sensible!" He put his hand on Lenny's shoulder and smiled at him, although his weariness made it an effort for him to smile. The next moment he was serious. "I want you to promise me something," he said.

"Certainly!" Lenny promptly replied, somewhat surprised at the grave tone in which Justin made his request.

"That you will not go into politics for at least five years after you have graduated," said Justin. "In other words, not until you have had a chance to get a grip on yourself."

"There is only one thing I want to do badly," Lenny returned. "I want to be as successful in law at your age as you have been. The rest can wait." And he wondered why Justin turned away wearily. "I'm off to those exams now. Don't wish me luck. Luck won't answer the questions I'll get."

"Next year you won't be sorry about going up for the test," said Justin, pressing his hand warmly.

Day after day Lenny took his place among his classmates and made feeble attempts to answer the questions. He had no need of confessing his failure to his mother. She saw it in his silence, his abstracted, worried air, and his guilty glance when he caught her eye.

On the last day he came to her and put his arms about her. As she looked at the dull eyes and the pale face of the boy upon whom her whole life was centred, she said quickly:

"I know! Doesn't it all show that you made a mistake to hurry as you did? What need was there of it, Leonard? And the result has been, not a real test of your ability, but an amount of endless worry I should not have allowed!"

"Then you do not believe me a miserable shirker?" he cried. "You do not believe that I am only good for the scrap heap?"

"What strange things you say!" his mother exclaimed. "You have simply not given yourself any chance at all. I should have insisted on an additional year of tutoring. Then you could have entered a lawyer's office for a year, so as to get accustomed to law books and the profession itself. There was time for college. And I should have opposed your using your summers for the league!"

"I'm afraid you will always try to spoil me by coddling," said Lenny.

"A little of it doesn't harm when we are about to put all our energy to the test. Encouragement is a sort of breathing spell."

"Oh, I want no more breathing spells!" cried Lenny, beginning to pace the floor. "I simply won't let myself be spoiled! It's my last 'flunk.' I'll take the year over again; but I'll squeeze out of it every bit in it! Dear mamsy, it's been very hard not to pass up with the other fellows in the course."

"There isn't time to talk about that now!" she said. "We have got to prepare to enjoy our summer. And you have visits to pay, you know, after the way you have neglected people."

"Mother, there isn't anybody like you in the whole world!" Lenny cried.

But he deferred the visit his mother expected him to pay to Gertrude Breen's home. He could not face Conny with

the story of his year's failure. He preferred that this should get to her some other way. So instead of going, he prepared to write.

Planting his feet on the window-sill, and lighting a cigarette, he began his letter. It was in a whimsical vein, very much as she might have written it herself; and Lenny laughed, and labored at his whim until it covered several pages.

Then he stopped, caught by a fit of moodiness. He was too fagged to light another cigarette. As he stared out of the window, he wondered how kind the future would be to him.

"It is true that I am a boy," he reflected. "But I want all the things that a man wants—place, fame, recognition —everything! How hard will I have to fight? Because I must not be beaten! For mamsy's sake—and Conny's, too —and all my friends!"

He glanced down at the words he had written. They seemed empty, even silly; and he wondered how he had come to laugh at them. He thought of many things as he idly watched the landscape.

"I haven't failed because of the amount of work I had to do!" he exclaimed. "I simply haven't worked! What's the use of faking? I can't fool *myself!* I haven't got the will power to stick out any hard job! It has got to stop!" Then he asked, "But what could have broken me down?"

A moment later he sat back stiffly in his chair. There had arisen in his mind the robust figure of Maur, healthy, vigorous, almost unbeatable. Lenny had made a fleeting comparison between that powerful figure and his own. Tears of intense dissatisfaction sprang to his eyes. Then he started, conscious of the gaze of some one.

Although he kept himself under control as he turned, his nerves almost shrieked. His mother laid her hand on his arm.

"You—are not thinking about anything except your big plans for the future—surely?" she said in an insistent voice.

He mastered his depression at once, and cried, "Oh, no!" Then he pulled up a chair for her. "This smoke doesn't bother you, does it?" he asked. "There isn't much of it, to be sure." As he talked, he kept patting her hand. "I always want to plan. But it is about time I resigned that and got to doing things. If I could only win my first case! It might be the smallest affair in the world, but I would feel like Alexander the Great!"

His mother spoke of the better English he now used. He was pleased that she noticed it.

"My law work was responsible for that, I guess," he said. "It's nothing to boast of. You know I've had better opportunities than most fellows, mother! I've done nothing but gotten spoiled, instead of making use of my chances."

"You're quite too sensitive to be spoiled," she answered. "I've always been afraid of just the opposite. It is like all my foolish fears, I suppose. You remember, I believed you might learn to smoke to excess." Lenny sat very rigid. "But you have not become a slave to the habit. A mother is a strange being!"

"What a wise mamsy I have!" he said, in lieu of anything else.

"Then let me tell you the plan I have formed for our vacation. Gertrude Breen has asked me to chaperon her this summer, since Mr. Mahan intends to run down to the

shore to see her. I intend to get a big cottage, and we will divide the rooms——"

"Too bad! I forgot to tell you something,—I was so upset about the exams!" Lenny broke in. "A couple of classmates of mine intend to take a motor boat to the banks of the St. Lawrence, and to camp there. They've invited me to make one of the party. I said I would go. Of course, I'll tell them now I can't. They were the only fellows I cared to chum with, what little chumming I had time for. They'll get somebody else."

"Oh, but you're to go with them!" cried his mother. "Don't you see that I will have Gertrude and Conny with me? You will spoil my summer by refusing this chance to live out in the open! Why, it is glorious!"

"As if you aren't sorry to have me do it—to get so far away from you!" said Lenny.

His mother drew a long breath—then smiled.

"I must get accustomed to your being grown up," she told him. "You must begin to plan for yourself. And you can't be very satisfied with women chattering near you all the time. I'm glad, very, that you are going! How happy you look! You did want to go!"

"That wasn't it," said Lenny. "I have a big secret to tell you. Suppose I keep it quiet for a day."

She agreed. They sat there for some time, joking like two old friends, Lenny still holding back the mysterious "something" of which he had hinted. When his mother left him, there was laughter on his lips.

"Oh, I shall get a hold on myself this summer!" he suddenly cried, rising, and extending his arms. "I'm going to put up the biggest sort of a fight!—for her sake! What if I have lost a year? There won't be any quit now! Or tiredness, either!"

He shook off his indolence and his apologetic air. He was soon living in an atmosphere of ambition again. Fighting off every return of depression. he plunged busily into the preparation for his summer outing.

In this mood he did not need much spurring to visit Conny and her uncle. When he came up the walk, Conny was looking over her rose-bushes.

"Ah, how d'y' do, Mr. Craigie?" she said with a little bow.

"I don't think I quite know this minute," he returned with a smile, holding out his hand.

But Conny was inexorable.

"Taking a stroll through the country?" she continued, coolly. "Fine day, isn't it?"

Too taken aback to answer in kind, Lenny could only say:

"That's a nice way to receive a fellow when he has found time for a visit!"

"Oh, is it a visit?" said Conny. "And you've sent no card?"

"Quit it!" Lenny cried. "You know I couldn't come!"

"Yes, so you've kept reminding me every now and then—about six times in four months. But here comes uncle!"

Trevor, brighter, but with his shoulders very stooped, came hurrying toward Lenny, with both his hands extended. There was a glad light in Conny's eyes when she saw how warmly Lenny responded to the greeting.

"I've just been trying to tell your niece that I've been a home body," said Leonard.

"But 'home-keeping youth have ever homely wits'," Trevor quoted.

"I felt that way when I framed up the excuse; and Conny helped along the feeling," said the offender.

"Which reminds me that, although I'm going, *I* needn't frame up any excuse for it," said Conny. "I've got an appointment. See you again, Mr. Craigie."

And with a nod, she hurried away, while Lenny looked angrily after her. The next moment he was pleading:

"Now, Mr. Trevor, is that fair? No one can know the uphill time I've had this year! I stayed away because I didn't want to speak of it, and you make a fellow open right up! I want to bring my friends my successes, not my failures."

"Tut! tut! Youth to speak of failure!" cried Trevor. "What nonsense! A little set-back, I imagine. Why call it anything else? Mr. Mahan, I hear, has looked with disfavor on your hurrying into law without taking a college course of a general character first. You see, we are thinking of you all the time. So you owe it to Conny, at least, to bring her all your news, good, bad and indifferent! And to come often. But your thoughts seem to be turned inwards—always! They must be, or they would have noticed a very decided fact."

Lenny shook his head, at a loss to know what he meant.

"What a preoccupied young man!" said Trevor. " 'None is so blind as he who will not see!' And thus you have missed the chance of making yourself useful. My dear friend, do you know that Constance is growing more beautiful every day?"

"Certainly!" said Lenny. "I have seen that for a dozen years. In fact, she has made a habit of growing beautiful!"

"Ah, but you must tell her so!" cried Trevor. "Do not take it so much for granted. Tell her she is beautiful! Don't look at her as if she were an unchangeable bit of bric-a-brac you had seen again and again!"

"Great Cæsar's ghost!" gasped Lenny. "Why should I tell her that she is fine? She won't stand for that sort of thing from me!"

"How do you know?" asked Trevor promptly. "Ah, you don't seem to catch just what I mean——"

"Oh, yes, I do!" Lenny said. "But she won't stand it from me. She'll laugh at me."

"Her laugh won't be what you expect—because she thinks highly of you," said her uncle.

"But Conny knows what I think of her. And if I spoke in any flattering way, it mightn't leave us the sort of friends we've always been," Lenny argued. "We're just the same two kids we were ten years ago; and we'll always keep that way."

Nevertheless, Trevor's words were not thrown away upon him. He began to see Conny in a somewhat different light —not the slip of a girl whom he used to banter, or with whom he might while away an hour in talk; but a growing young woman, of considerable importance to a great many people. And during his visits prior to his departure for the camping trip, he found that Conny's band of admirers had been on the increase. The additions were men of almost Justin's age. Their constant "Miss Trevor" bewildered him.

"Why, one of them might marry her before we least expected it!" he exclaimed one day to himself.

During his remaining visits, in his anxiety to see what impression these admirers were making upon Conny, he misread a good deal of her interest in them. He also missed the fact that she was making a great deal of him before the others, and that they were jealous.

Finally he blurted out one day:

"Conny, dear, you won't marry before I come back, will you?"

She first stared at him, and then exploded with laughter.

"Ah," he said, "that's good! Go ahead! Keep on laughing! It removes all my doubts!"

"I may disappoint you yet," she replied, smiling now.

Lenny was surprised to find himself thrilled by a sudden shy look she darted at him.

"You would only be squaring up for the way I've disappointed you, I guess," he said.

"Silly!" she cried, and pinned a flower to the lapel of his coat with an elaborate ado.

"Now that you've been that nice, I've got something to tell you," he began. He was surprised to see Conny step back a little. "I'm going to write a book," he said. "It is to be about brave deeds of American soldiers and sailors. If I wasn't going to dedicate it to mother (which I will, of course), I would have dedicated it to you."

"Thanks," she said, simply, holding out her hand. "The first chapter in that book will be about your father. I know! What does your mother say?"

"She doesn't know it yet," said Lenny.

He had intended that she should be the first to know. Now he hastened to tell her. As he unfolded the scheme of the book to her, she listened gravely, pleased with the care with which he was planning this newest venture of his.

"It came to me," he said, "when I saw that I couldn't be of much use to the baseball league this summer. Not that I won't be ready to jump right in if things go wrong with the boys! But I began to feel that I wasn't serving a big purpose any more. So I got the idea of gathering together these brave exploits. The important thing was to know where to go for my information. Well, I've got

a fine list of books and magazines. There's one act, though, I won't need any information about!"

"It will be the sort of book that will do us all good!" said his mother. "You will find that many men have performed deeds as brave as your father's——"

"As brave!" exclaimed Lenny in wonder.

"Why, yes. There were many other brave exploits to make one tremble with pride for the brave men who did them!" said his mother.

"Oh, I can be fair, too!" Lenny told her. "But to me what *he* did overtops them all! Think of crawling into that place!"

"When has a day passed that I did not think of it?" said his mother, with a faraway look in her eyes. After a little while she suddenly said, "You would have done the same thing."

He sought to imagine himself in precisely the position his father occupied on that memorable day. Then he said earnestly:

"Yes, I would have climbed through the scuttle."

They kept talking about the projected book up to the day of his going. The excitement of the camping trip robbed him of his listless air, and gave a touch of color to his face. When he went to say good-by to Trevor and Conny, his smile evoked from the latter:

"Look at that grin, would you! You must be awfully glad to go away from folks you know, Leonard Craigie!"

"Guess again," said Lenny. He told her, "You're perfectly dazzling to-day, miss. Who has been talking to you?"

"Now you're silly!" she retorted, coloring.

"I wouldn't be hung for lying, I guess," he persisted.

Conny eyed him in wonder. "You've become a plain

goose—just because you're going to get a long holiday!" she said.

The actor greeted him with the exclamation:

"How like a chameleon you are! You are never twice the same! Ah, you young people! We old ones change, too; but ours is no tramp uphill and downhill. It is all downhill!"

His remark dealt with himself. He had been growing more lank, his gaunt features were dreamier than ever, and his manner was of one who was fighting great inner battles. He was pleased when Lenny paid him a compliment by saying:

"I always find the youngest people I know right here in this room!"

"Yes, isn't uncle looking actually boyish?" cried Conny.

"Ah, Constance and I have promised each other to keep young for all time!" said Trevor. "Why should one bend before the advancing years? It is as unwise as when youth tries to assume the habits of age. Which reminds me that our friend Robert Maur is creating a stir over in New York. They are calling him 'The Young Phenom.' A mere boy, too! I wonder if the newspaper notices he is receiving are spoiling him?"

"Well, we will leave it to Conny to take a fall out of him if they are," said Lenny, looking mischievously at her out of the corner of his eye. "She humbles us all, when necessary. Even me."

He was solemn about it until he saw how seriously she took his words. Then he broke out into laughter. It was full of abandon and forgetfulness. Lenny seemed to throw all worry overboard. Both his hearers were to remember that laughter as long as they lived.

He caught at Conny's hands, and swung her about.

After a few turns she was swinging him. When she paused, he went down to the floor in a heap, his face ashen.

He tried to smile when they helped him to his feet.

"My head will catch up with my toes pretty soon," he said. "Queer how that upset me!"

In the Pullman car that night, as he traveled toward Buffalo, where he was to join the campers, his thoughts divided themselves between his mother and Conny. In musing about the latter, he dwelt on the way she had clung to his hand when he had told her about his failure at the examinations. With equal tact she had kept silent about the baseball league, fully aware how he felt about being away from it for a whole summer.

The rocking Pullman berth soon made him drowsy. But before sleep came, he murmured:

"She's splendid! Nothing like her! She's worth doing things for!"

To his sleepy brain this meant both his mother and Conny.

CHAPTER XI

LENNY'S camping trip was hardly to prove the invigorating rest to which he had looked forward. His two companions, quiet enough when at college, took the bit into their mouths, and turned the outing into a period of reckless dissipation. At first Lenny was prone to be backward about this new way of living. But his highly nervous state and his depression soon drove him to follow the example of the others. During the moments when he would rebel against this, he felt that if he had been in better physical condition, he might have resisted the temptation to live wildly and unreasonably.

The motor boat took the party of three and their helper to Canadian towns. But for the helper (a quiet, muscular man who could cook and make up a bed, and who soon learned to run the boat), the three might have gone to the bottom of the St. Lawrence on more than one occasion. Staggering into the boat in the last stages of drunkenness, they would insist on steering, sending the launch at top speed down the river.

John McCormick, the servant, was forced to take the law into his own hands when this happened, despite his youthful employers. During every drunken period they discharged him. But he would land them safely and finish out the evening, certain that on next morning they would thank him for getting them alive to their tenting place.

In one instance, as he forcibly took the steering wheel from one of them when they had piled into the boat in a drunken condition, he received a blow in the face. The aggressor found himself measuring his length on the bottom of the boat under the impact of a bony fist. In the squabble which followed, Lenny, although tipsy, took McCormick's part. His two companions resented this, and attacked him. In the melee, the three young fellows went overboard, almost overturning the boat as they did so. Only McCormick's coolness saved the launch. As they went over the side, he flung himself in the other direction, and so balanced the vessel. His whole thought at that moment was to save it, in order to have some place from which to pull the boys out of the water.

The next moment he realized that they were in a perilous state indeed. Only Lenny came to the surface near the boat. The other two, some distance away, were trying, in a half-drunken manner, to keep their heads above water. There was enough moonlight to guide McCormick, but it was dangerous to maneuver the rather large boat among the struggling boys.

He threw a rope to Lenny, who, somewhat sobered now, clambered on board. As soon as that boy could catch his breath, he cried:

"You take Wells, and I'll go after Grosse!"

And he dived back into the water, followed by McCormick. The latter, powerful though he was, found himself almost overpowered by the frantic Wells, and it was some time before he managed to get him into the boat. When he turned to see what had become of young Craigie, he immediately plunged back into the water.

Lenny had seized Grosse just as that man was going down for the last time, and had struggled towards the rope

dangling from the boat. But the man he held, who had imbibed more than the others that evening, instead of helping him, tried to throw him off. Lenny did not let go and yelled words of advice, only to find that he was gradually being pulled under water.

There was a moment when he was tempted to release his hold, in order not to go down with the half-crazed man. But he did not, and fought on, although weariness was numbing him. Gathering together all the nervous force which had so far sustained him, he made a desperate lunge for the rope. He caught it, and then tried to cling to it, the while sobbing in his despair of continuing the hold, although he was gritting his teeth at the same time.

He held to the rope until it slipped out of his powerless hand. As he feebly struck out in an effort to keep the water from dragging him down to death, he was seized in a powerful grip. By a wonderful display of strength, McCormick managed to get the two on board the boat.

"Pretty good for one night's work," he remarked with a shrug as he surveyed the three students lying at his feet. Then he discovered that Lenny had fainted, and set to work to revive him.

The latter asked, as soon as he recovered consciousness: "Did I let go of him?"

"No. You held on," McCormick replied.

"Well, that was the hardest half-hour of my life!" said Lenny with a sigh.

"It wasn't more than four or five minutes," McCormick told him. But at the same time he put out his hand and took Lenny's, which he shook warmly, without a word.

While Lenny's companions got over the accident without showing any ill-effects, he needed two days to recover from the nervous shock. During that time he told them bluntly

that he was going to cut down the amount of drinking he did. They were too conscious of what they owed him to sneer at this. So they left him to his cigarettes, while they continued their roystering excursions.

The monotonous life Lenny now led soon proved too taxing for him, however. He tried canoeing. As a result, in a month his old-time vigor and ambition showed themselves again. He would glide away to some quiet, isolated spot, and would then either fish or jot down notes for his intended book. But his loneliness grew unbearable. So he slipped back into the visits to town with his companions, although his excesses never reached the stage of complete drunkenness now.

Before summer was over, the three students began to quarrel, and finally separated. Lenny, rather than give his mother the impression that the camping had been a failure, went on an extended canoeing trip. He managed to get through a part of August without giving in to the wish to join her. At last he hastily packed his belongings, and set out for home. Instead, however, of going to the resort where his mother was staying, he headed for Germantown.

As he walked to the field where two of the major clubs of the league were in the midst of a stirring contest, he changed his mind about showing himself openly, and slipped to the rear of the crowd.

"Ah," he murmured, while watching the excited crowd, and the sharp struggle for victory, "this is home! These are my friends!"

Then he felt a little depressed, and stole home, where he sought his room, and dropped into his favorite chair before one of the windows.

"What a rotten summer I've made of it!" he growled, as

he tapped a cigarette on the arm of his chair, preparatory to lighting it.

That evening he joined his mother. Only the tan which he had accumulated kept the pallor of his face from showing. And from the moment he saw his mother, until they were ready to return to Germantown, he pretended a buoyancy of spirit which completely deceived her. When he was with others his unrest cropped out, so he spent most of his time alone.

"A fine year of law, and the writing of that book! That's what I am going to do!" he declared to his mother.

Deep down in his heart he felt that the coming period of study would be a trying one, despite his familiarity with the subjects. As the weeks wore on, he grew less inclined to forgive the use he had made of his summer, and was disgusted with his two camping companions.

They, for their part, spoke of him as the greatest "cigarette fiend" they had ever met.

"He's a fine chap, and a brave one, and all that," was their verdict. "But he's 'dopey' on cigarettes. He'd rather smoke than eat. That's what's knocked him out. And he hasn't tumbled to it."

Lenny started the work of the first term briskly. Later he was too indisposed to attend lectures, and spent his time in the college club-house playing billiards, and laying bets on the result of the games. At times, for no reason that he would have been able to give, he felt that he would, after all, finish the year in good style.

This self-delusion came at longer and longer intervals; for the more he got behind in his work, the less inclined he was to catch up. At home he kept up his show of cheerfulness, a smiling exterior covering a very distressed state

of mind. He put aside the thought of seeking Justin again for help in his studies.

"I've troubled him enough already," he reflected. "And he would think it mighty queer that I couldn't keep up with things after flunking a year. He doesn't look awfully happy himself, either."

He did not go to see Conny, and letters ceased to pass between them. When she came over to take dinner with his mother, he would either treat her with indifference, or tease her unmercifully. Even the fact that the club-house of the league was actually being erected failed to rouse him.

But after this period of ebb came one of flow. He began to fight against the prospect of going down in defeat again at the law school. Fortifying himself with strong coffee, he managed to keep awake at nights to do his law reading. His Christmas holidays were sacrificed to this spirit of work. When his mother remonstrated with him at his late hours under a lamp, he gently, but firmly, asked to be left alone.

"This first year will make or mar my course at college," he said. "Won't I have next summer to idle in?"

His application continued, although his waning strength was crying for a halt. Fatigue not only wore him out, but it left his mind foggy. He plodded on, however, and was bitter against the use he had made of the first term. With the approach of the examination period, his sleep became a series of nightmares, when he was haunted by visions of failure.

But with the arrival of the time of the test, he got a measure of confidence in himself. He attacked the examination papers without the uncertainty he had feared. Instead of going down in ignominious failure, he passed with credit. The task, however, had been too great. When he

came home to announce that "he was through with the first year at last!" his haggard appearance almost belied the victory.

It was then that his mother decided to bring this nerve-racking state of affairs to an end.

"Leonard, you are done with college!" she declared. "It is time we stopped acting like mad people! I don't believe in sacrificing you to your ambitions! You are going to enter a lawyer's office, and to acquire your law in a more leisurely way. The thought of your passing through a mental crisis at the end of every college year is becoming frightful to me!"

Instead of the opposition she expected, especially after his success, Lenny said:

"Yes, I'll enter a lawyer's office. You're right. You always are. Lumped up examinations at the end of a year are bound to be a strain. I dreamed about them every night. They almost drove me crazy!" He laughed a little in sheer relief at being able to speak about it. He was serious as he went on: "I had begun to regard the end of the year with dread. It was terrible! It made a coward of me!"

He struggled with his tears when his mother put her arms about him.

"I know you won't let me tell you that I have disappointed you," he said. "But perhaps I haven't wasted much time, after all. Those months at college haven't been thrown away."

"Every day must have brought you something of value," she replied. "No, we won't speak of time wasted! I wish you had suggested long ago that you wished to enter a lawyer's office to get your theory and practice."

"Oh, I have often thought of it!" said Lenny. "But

there is a great glamor about a college degree and college associations. Well, there will be satisfaction, instead, in being in touch with men who are doing law work right at one's elbow! Will you let me begin right away, slowly? I'll tell you if it proves too hard during these warm months. Honest!"

"We will do nothing for a week but talk about your book," said his mother.

He gave in reluctantly. As they settled themselves for a chat about the several chapters he had already finished, the physical frailty of both mother and son would have struck a beholder. But as Lenny talked, his excitement played its customary part in giving him an appearance of energy, and it actually robbed him of fatigue.

The novelty of the change he was about to make gave him a new lease of life. He also felt that the opportunities for idling would be less, and a great burden fell from his shoulders because of the fact.

"Now that I will have to work every day," he told himself, "I won't be putting all my strength in a last minute spurt."

For him there was only one firm which he cared to enter for his legal apprenticeship—the one to which Justin Mahan belonged. That Justin might dissuade him from entering that office was the last thing he expected in the world. He was, therefore, somewhat stunned when his proposition found the older man dubiously shaking his head.

"Don't think of it," Justin urged. "I may as well tell you, Leonard, I'm going to get out of it myself very soon. Everything you would do here would be criticised by fault-finding superiors, and you'd get mental ague every time you submitted anything for their approval. I know your

mother thinks quite highly of them. But she can do better for you with her other influential lawyer friends. No, don't come here!"

Justin's advice was dictated by other reasons than the wish to keep Lenny away from "fault-finding" superiors. He did not want Lenny to find out how he—the Justin Mahan of great expectations—had fallen short in his law work.

His declaration that he would open an independent office aroused Lenny to a high pitch of enthusiasm. He saw, more surely outlined than ever, the sign, "Mahan & Craigie, Attorneys-at-Law."

"I should think you would be jolly glad to get out on your own hook!" he said.

"Well, it wouldn't be as good as being a member of this firm, of course," Justin frankly admitted. "I would be virtually starting all over again. But since my services are not appreciated here, why should I keep in a stew of dissatisfaction all the time?"

And he held out his cigarette-case, with the words, "Here is the great soother of all cares!—the magician that takes the sting out of dismal days!"

As Lenny was going, Justin said:

"Let me know what firm you decide upon. Your mother's influence ought to give you the pick of the best. Good luck to you, old man!"

Lenny stepped jauntily out of the elevator of the office building, only to go reeling against the opposite wall in a spell of dizziness which kept the ground about him whirling for some moments. When he staggered out into the street, he was thoroughly frightened.

"That's a new one on me!" he gasped.

He was alarmed. "Can that be the result of last sum-

mer's dissipation?" he wondered, fearful that it had worked some grave harm.

Slowly making his way through the busy Philadelphia thoroughfare, he began to review the set-backs ill-health had brought him. He finished by deciding to go to a physician, but to do so alone.

"There's no use in frightening mother," he reasoned; "especially if there is really nothing the matter with me worth worrying about."

Picking out a name which ranked high in Philadelphia medicine, he found enough courage to take his seat among a roomful of patients. He glanced about furtively to discover whether he had stumbled upon any of his mother's friends, but escaped that embarrassment.

When the physician finally nodded in his direction, Lenny was very far from happy. He was regretting his visit. Nor was the physician's professional smile very reassuring. But Lenny unhesitatingly plunged into a recital of his ailments. He was surprised at the length of time the physician took to look him over.

"One would think I was a prize-fighter," Lenny remarked to himself.

At last the doctor broke the silence to say:

"You must stop smoking. With your nervous organization, you must cut out cigarettes, or tobacco in any form, or it will use you worse than this. It works slower in other people. But you, and many like you, go down under it as if it were a battering ram. In the long run, it catches them all—yes, and breaks them all."

Then he went on to add to the list of ailments which Lenny had discovered for himself, and in every instance the physician was correct.

"In the main all of these troubles," he said, "have their

origin in the smoke which you take into your lungs. When the heart sends its blood to the lung cells to be purified, you supply it smoke, not air. Then the same blood must feed your brain and your nervous system, as well as other equally important parts of your body. I will give you some prescriptions. But they are only meant to correct trifling troubles. The cause of your graver troubles, tobacco, must be gotten rid of if you wish to be a well man again."

After some general advice about exercise and diet, he wound up: "I am now ready to turn you over to yourself. The rest is in your hands, Mr.—Mr.——"

He had paused with a smile, for he knew that the name Lenny had given him was an assumed one.

"I would rather not have you call me other than Mr. Brown," said Lenny.

He paid the required fee, thanked the physician for his advice, and made his way out of the office rather mechanically. The open street, flooded by sunlight, made him dizzy. He walked to a nearby public square, where he sat down on a bench. As he sought to catch the significance of his interview with the physician, he unconsciously lighted a cigarette and began to smoke.

Suddenly, with a gesture of repulsion and horror, he flung the cigarette away. His fright increased as he remembered how the physician had accurately hit off his physical troubles. The advice he had received appeared too necessary to be laughed off.

" 'You must stop smoking,' " he repeated. "It looks easy—but it's already taken some of the will power I need to fight it with—unless he was all wrong! And if he was wrong about any one thing, he was wrong about every-

thing else! But he was not—no, not after those wonderful guesses."

Finally he shook himself together, and walked to the station for a train home. He asked:

"What will I do without cigarettes? Won't I be fussy and nervous, and won't I be upset all the time?"

All that day he struggled frantically against the lure of "a smoke," and succeeded by holding up before himself his spells of illness, his failure in his work, and his duty to his mother. When hard beset, he would cry, "I must get rid of the habit for her sake! Oh, I must!"

For a whole week victory was his. During that time he did not go to see Justin, for fear that a cigarette-case would be extended to him. When he passed a tobacco store, he flew by it with his teeth shut. The odor of cigarettes on some of his coats almost drove him frantic. He did not dare to take in any of the professional baseball games then starting, much as he wished to, because of the smoking which would go on around him.

Then one day he found a half-filled package of cigarettes while rummaging in one of the drawers of his bureau —and the week's fight was lost. A little later he was saying exultantly:

"Why, I am feeling better than ever! It's like a tonic! For the first time in a long while I am myself again! It can't be hurting me! I could never feel like this if it was!"

He was soon deriding the advice of the physician.

"He couldn't take my money without trying to square himself somehow," Lenny laughingly said.

Once more he dropped back into the long spells of smoking. To ease his conscience somewhat he gave attention to the remainder of the physician's advice. He tried to diet,

and overcame his dislike for long walks, taking care that they did not bring him near Conny's home. Something more undesirable than a talk with her was in store for him, however, when he went out one afternoon. He met Bob Maur.

Lenny felt as if he had received a shock. He could not summon up enough strength to steady his glance against the searching gaze of the robust stock broker, who looked twenty-five, confident and strong. Lenny slouched somewhat; and his eyes had a haunted, apologetic look.

"Well, well!" exclaimed Maur, smiling at him. "I was bound to run into you! Tell me about every blessed thing! Are you realizing your expectations? How is your work going?"

"Not particularly well," Lenny blurted out, in spite of himself.

"That so?" Maur said, somewhat surprised by this frank confession. "Bad health again?"

"Yes, I guess I'm run down a bit," Lenny replied. He was sorry now that he had spoken hastily. "I wanted to pass my examinations with credit. I did do quite well. But I'm going to enter a lawyer's office, instead of finishing the whole course." Then he allowed himself a lie. "It was at the request of a big corporation attorney who is a friend of mother's. I am not free, though, to give his name, old man."

"Then I don't see what you're kicking about!" said Maur quickly, with unbelief in his manner.

"My bad health, of course," Lenny replied. "But I oughtn't to take a passing indisposition seriously! A youngster like me to worry about his health! It's ridiculous, isn't it? I'll get straightened out pretty soon! I've

got a lot of important work next year, for which I'll need every ounce of strength I can accumulate."

"*I* haven't had time to think of anything except the responsibilities that have been thrust upon me!" said Maur, tapping the ground with his cane. "Have you heard about what brought me to Philadelphia? It may be luck, but it means still more responsibility."

"What was it?" Lenny asked, a griping feeling of envy within him, a feeling he had not known so intensely before, which sickened him at heart, and almost made him feverish.

"Remember my Aunt Harriet? But say, didn't Conny tell you all about it? You couldn't have been around there lately!" exclaimed Maur.

The astonishment with which he said this revealed now little he gleaned from Conny about Lenny's moves.

"My time has been divided between the law library at the University and home. Didn't Conny tell you that?" Leonard sparred. He asked, "What about your Aunt Harriet? We were talking about *her*."

"When she died last month, she was good enough to leave me all she had," Maur related. "Sounds too good to be true, doesn't it? That's the way it looked to me when I first heard of it, especially when I found out what a pile of money it involved."

Lenny made no comment. Had his soul's salvation depended upon it, he could not have forced himself to say that he was glad.

"That's what brought me back from New York," Maur went on after waiting for the other to remark about his good luck, and enjoying the fact that Lenny could not. "I intend to put that money to use right away. I'm going into the brokerage business in Philadelphia with Dan

Howell, of Ruyder, Cressman and Company. Though he's over thirty-five, we've chummed splendidly. He's a conservative man. You'll wonder why I don't go in with dad. But what fun is there in being bossed, even by one's father? He is sore on me for not throwing my capital into his office. Come around to see me when I get fixed. I'll send you a card."

"I will," said Lenny briefly.

There was no slouch in his walk when he left Maur, until a turn of the corner allowed him to fall back into his nerveless gait. Then his hands clenched desperately. Tears of mortification were in his eyes. He tried to shrug away the loneliness he felt. But "Beaten!" loomed large before him.

He had no inclination to go home; it was the last place to which he cared to bring the feeling of defeat which was suffocating him. He told himself that he had been more unkind to his mother than to himself. So why should he trouble her with his presence—especially since she believed him to be living in a happier frame of mind than for some time past?

Brooding, he walked aimlessly on. He tried to see the future, fully aware now that his smoking had been entirely responsible for the sapping of his energies. The belief that cigarettes could not harm him had given way to the certainty that he was once more going downhill because of them. He asked himself whether he had a right to withhold from his mother what the physician had told him. Then he hit upon the idea of going West for a year's life on horseback.

"My law will have to wait," he said. "With renewed health I will be able to put up a stronger fight. I can get through my preparation for the bar in two years. I won't

be over twenty-three then. No, I'm not down and out by any means! Mother will go West with me. She would profit by the change, too."

Renewed ambition urged him on again. Everything became luminous with promise. A moment later his dreams collapsed as physical faintness seized him. He was glad to be near one of Germantown's main streets, within reach of a saloon. There he took a drink of brandy.

At dinner that evening he forced joke after joke to hide his gloom from his mother. Afterwards he sought a corner of the porch, and wearily watched the landscape darken as night came on. His stagnation of spirit almost made him shudder.

As the shadows about the house darkened into night, he felt a tightening of his heart-strings. The blended chirp of crickets was like a wail to his ears, and he shrank further into his seat. He covered his ears with his hands, and shut his eyes. But the roar within his brain was as maddening as that without.

His hands dropped to his sides. He stared with wide-open eyes into the inky sky beyond the branches of the trees. A sob stole past his throat. He battered the next one back with furious self-command. Then the strength ebbed again. He lay back, with parched lips, hardly daring to breathe.

There was a step on the porch. He was sure it was his mother, and at once he decided upon a course of action. As he waited with suspended breath, a hand was laid upon his shoulder. With more volume of tone than he believed himself master of, he said:

"Sit down. I want to talk to you. I am glad you're here at this moment."

The chair beside him creaked. Then Lenny, without turning, broke out:

"I want to tell you that I'm a wreck. I'm beaten—badly! I'm done for. It's the cigarettes. My nerves have all gone to pieces. I'm tobacco soaked. I've been told that by a doctor. And now there's no hope for me here. I've got to go away. I've been hiding it from you. I've been lying about my condition. I've been keeping back how much I've been smoking. Cigarettes killed my college career. I can't sleep. I'm sick half the time. I've gotten to be useless. There's no use trying to delude you or myself any longer. The jig is up! I feel that if I'm not to die right under your eyes, I must get away. Mother, I'm not a coward, and I'm not afraid of death, but—but I'm afraid now!"

The chair beside him had been thrust back, and its occupant had risen with a moan.

"It's been the smoking," Lenny went on, as if to have done with it; "the same thing that struck down dad. You were right when you warned me. I didn't believe it could be so. But because of the cigarettes, my studying never amounted to much. I had to loaf most of the time. I couldn't get down to any work—until it was too late. All the studying I did in the last two years could never have been the cause of all this. Well, it's all up with me! I'm going away. And I'd rather go away alone."

"Lenny!" came in a choked, terrified voice which did not belong to his mother.

He started up, clinging to the arms of his chair, and glared, like a trapped wild thing, at—Conny!

"I did not mean to listen," she sobbed. "At first I thought you knew it was I. Then when you talked on, I

wanted to hear. I had to! Say that it's all exaggerated, Lenny! Say it! O my Lenny!"

His amazement was slowly giving way to chagrin and anger.

"But why should you have listened?" he demanded. "What could it have meant to you to hear those terrible things? You should have stopped me!"

At once there came in return:

"I had to hear because I am your friend! And I'm glad it was I, and not your mother! Think what those words would have meant to her! And you had to speak them to somebody! Why not to me? I want to help you, Lenny. Why shouldn't you win out against the cigarettes? You always could fight! Who knows that better than I? You are no coward! But you should win out right here, and not run away from a difficulty. Stay at home, and cut down your smoking a little at a time. You needn't stop it all at once. Oh, you will succeed. You will! You are going to start all over again, too! You can do it! You are young! I know you are going to realize all you've been hoping for, you dear boy! You are going to be one of my wishes come true."

He was eyeing her almost sullenly. Then he said in a tone of derision:

"Start all over again? It sounds easy enough! But I can't concentrate on anything. And I must smoke. No, it's too late. Nothing is easy any more. All the fight has gone out of me!"

He went on, in a tone of surprise, as if speaking to himself: "Who would have believed cigarettes could have done it? I always thought drink was the curse to be afraid of. And there was Justin smoking, and it didn't seem to harm him. That's what kept me from quitting long ago. Ever

since I knew him, he's had a cigarette in his mouth. So it seemed all right for me to do it. Not that I blame him! He wasn't urging me on. He was just an example. But I never had his strength. It's all right now to say, 'Break it off!' I can't. I've tried. You wouldn't understand. You couldn't. It may seem funny—a little cigarette, and I a man! But I guess I'm not much of a man now. I'm going away—out West. But why should I be telling you all this? And what right have you to listen?"

"Because, except for your mother, Lenny, there isn't any one in the whole world who cares quite as much as I. You think I'm still a young girl. But you forget we've been growing up," Conny reminded him. "You've got to listen to me because I'm your friend—because never have I stopped thinking about you, even though you tried to forget all about me. All I want to say is that you've got to stay, Lenny. You'd smoke just as much if you went West. If you stayed on, and made an effort, all the old ambition would come back. There are so many here who care for you! If you kept near them, you could do lots of things to advance yourself. If you were far away, you would not care. Then there is your mother. And Justin Mahan is awfully fond of you. Aunt thinks you're splendid. Uncle Trevor is one of the best friends you have. And am *I* not? All these almost in one house, too! And there are plenty of people in Germantown who care. Why, all those boys you made the league for! No, you're not going away! You're going to make us all proud of you right here!"

To Lenny the list of those who cared did not appear very long, so utter was his loneliness just then. But in that moment he was greatly moved by the sweet beauty of the girl pleading with him. It winged its way through the darkness, and stirred him. He could see Conny quite clearly

now. His dullness began to give way to interest. It was true—she was no longer a child in short skirts, but a young woman. It stood out as something he had not quite seen before—as something very strange and very important. And a great respect for her grew up within him in that short space of time.

"I know that your mother will not let you go, if you are going in that spirit," she was saying. "And I—" her hand went out to him, "—I wouldn't know what to do without you, even though you have neglected me so much. Will you not stay for our sakes?"

"I'll stay," he said, drawing a deep breath. "I see now that I would have had to come back soon, anyhow. You're good to me, Conny—and I'm not worth it!"

"Aren't you, though!" she cried, her voice quivering with feeling. "If you only knew what you mean to us! And you're going to mean more!"

As a shadow cast by some one moving in front of the light in the Captain's library showed on the path leading from the house, Conny said, "Your mother is up there. You want to go in and talk to her, don't you? Don't tell her I was here, though."

"Dear mother!" he said, turning away a little.

"You know I never saw my mother," Conny said simply.

"Think what little joy I have brought mine!" he replied.

"But how could you when you are just beginning?" she said as she covered his hands with hers. "Don't you know you will bring her a great deal when you tell her that you've won out against this terrible habit?"

Then she softly slipped away. As the white-garbed figure vanished, he extended his hands with a gesture of determination.

"We aren't beaten yet!" he exclaimed.

CHAPTER XII

Colonel Henderson was a more frequent visitor at Mrs. Craigie's home than ever, despite the gossip which this created. He claimed that he came as a friend—nothing more. And so he proved himself, for he took care to have information about safe investments on the occasion of every visit. Mrs. Craigie was gratitude itself for this help, for she was making plans for the future.

"Leonard must have all the money he can make use of," she said to Gertrude when the Colonel's name came up. "Suppose Lenny should give up law, and take to writing. How valuable it would be for him to have an independent income! The book at which he has been working shows that he has literary ability. And I am safe in securing him that income, for he has always been chary about spending large sums. He is too thoughtful to do so."

Yet only several days after, Lenny asked for money; and he repeated this request on the following day; and still again on the day after this. Just a week had intervened between his interview with Conny and this sudden call for funds. With that money he had gone to the bettors' section at one of the professional baseball parks, and had wagered sums, not once, but six times, spread over as many afternoons.

This betting had its origin in an accident. In a train going into Philadelphia, he had overheard a discussion on "betting on pitchers." The claim was made that a wager laid on a reputable pitcher, rather than on the work of a club as a whole, would win. The man who argued claimed, further, that most of the bettors were not keen students of the game, and did not follow with any care the out-of-town work of the baseball clubs.

Eager to test this, and tempted by the excitement it promised, Lenny had gone to the games and had "betted on pitchers." He had no trouble in locating that portion of the grand-stand where the bettors congregated. His money, however, went to his opponents four times in succession. Careless playing on the part of the club behind the pitcher upon whom he had wagered had been the cause.

But the fifth and sixth times he won. When he visited the grand-stand again, he chanced upon Justin Mahan. Lenny hid his disappointment at this interruption to his week of excitement. He derived some pleasure, however, in listening to Justin's comments upon the various plays as they came off. In the end he was also pleased to see that had he betted, he would have won.

When he asked Justin to have something to drink after the game, the older man was first surprised, and then amused.

"I keep forgetting that your tender years are no more!" he immediately said to mollify Lenny. "Still, I think we'll be wise to keep your dissipation down to beer."

Over the glasses they spoke of the increasing profits which every season brought those who were financing baseball teams.

"Nothing else in the world gets the enormous free advertising which falls to the game," said Justin; and sud-

denly awoke to the fact that Lenny was ordering a second round of drinks.

"None of that for you!" he said, rising, and halting the waiter.

"Why, it's only beer!" said Lenny.

"Well, we've had enough, even if it is!" And Justin led him off, remarking, "It was only yesterday that you were a bit of a fellow, and now you're trying to pose as a toper!"

They went into Germantown, talking and smoking like tried comrades. Mahan advised:

"Go to Europe for a couple of years, Leonard. There is time to break into law. And people have a way of looking up to a traveled man. They would forgive you all your sins of omission—such as not taking a college degree."

"Ah, then people are really making remarks about it!" Lenny cried at once. "I knew they would! I knew it!"

"Oh, only one fellow, that's all—about whom we need not concern ourselves," said Justin carelessly, conscious of the break he had made.

"Bob Maur, I suppose!" Lenny guessed at once.

"Well, if we must speak about it, why, who else but Bob Maur?" said Justin with a shrug. "But he need not concern us. We could count his friends on the fingers of one hand, and have some fingers to spare; unless he believes that those who want to use him are his friends. So why should we bother about him?" He looked at his companion out of the corner of his eye as he added, "He is paying a good deal of attention to Conny."

Leonard lowered his eyelids a little, and did not reply at once. When he spoke, he said, "I would wish him anything in the world but *that!* If he *were* deserving of her, I would wish him well in that too!"

They were ready to alight. Lenny had thrown away his cigarette as they came out of the smoking-car, and he was happy that he had done so, for Conny and Gertrude were at the station. As Justin went ahead with the latter, Conny said in a low voice, "Let us walk slowly, Leonard. I must have you to myself for a little while."

After an unendurable silence, Lenny exclaimed, "Well, won't you say something?"

"I expected that you would come to see me," Conny said somewhat hesitatingly.

"I might have done so—instead of going to these baseball games. But—but I'd rather not, Conny," he was candid enough to tell her.

She changed the conversation by saying, "You are going to the shore next week with your mother, I suppose."

"Yes, thank goodness!" he exclaimed. "I'm so nervous that even the small excitement of watching a baseball game upsets me! I'll rest this summer—and finish that book."

"Why don't you bring it around, and show me what you have done?" she pleaded.

"Don't ask me to come to see you," he said hurriedly.

"I won't, if you are not worried about how things are going with you," she replied.

"I'm trying to see my way clear. I am not sure of myself yet!" he confessed.

"But it must be soon! soon! Don't put it off!" she cried.

"Oh, I would so much rather you stopped thinking about me, Conny!" he begged. "There are whole troops of boys and girls who can make you happy. Just forget me. I'll let you get on good terms with me when I fall on my feet again. Not before that! Come, it's a bargain!"

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed. Then she said in a whimsical

manner, "It would be a poor return for the many times you stood up for me against the boys when we were kids!"

"I hardly remember those times now," he said.

"Oh, but I do!" she cried. Then she asked, "What were you and Justin so chummy about?"

"He was urging me to go to Europe for a couple of years. But I'm still stuck on the idea of forcing him into partnership with me," Lenny said, with the ghost of a smile. "Well, I turn off here. But tell me—what has Bob Maur been saying about me?"

"Just as much as I would let him, so he's had to keep you out of our talks," she replied. "Why? Did Justin mention his name? They were together for a few moments yesterday. I suppose Bob asked about you. No wonder he was quiet when I came back. Trust Justin to make him uncomfortable! Oh, why shouldn't everybody get along with everybody else?"

Lenny held out his hand in parting. She took it with a quick little motion which gladdened him for the time being.

"Your vacation must be half play and half work, Jack, my dear boy!" she counseled.

"What wouldn't I give to make every day a whole workday!" he exclaimed.

"You could give your promise," said Conny. "—But I had better catch up with aunty."

He smiled at her as he bade her good-by. She watched him walk toward his home, and her lips were tightly compressed to keep back the tears. When she reached her own home, she threw herself into her uncle's arms, and clung to him.

He could not understand why she was silent. She was saying to herself:

"It won't do to tell anybody about Lenny. He'll manage

for himself. I must not talk about him. If I interfered too much, I might lose his friendship! He will be himself again soon! Oh, he will!"

Then suddenly she whispered to her uncle, "Sometimes I think you and I might go away somewhere, and never, never come back!"

His eyes flashed, as if vistas of joy had been unfolded to his eager soul. He remained like one in a dream, absently stroking Conny's hair. Then he shook himself together, and put away the gripping desire to cry: "But you really belong to me anyhow! You, Constance, are my own child! Of course we can go—and never come back!"

Instead he asked, "What made you sad so suddenly?"

"Because I can't understand things. When I was young, everything was simpler. Why, for instance, shouldn't Aunt Gertrude be happy about *you?*"

"But your aunt is not altogether happy about many other things," he told her, seizing the opportunity to impress upon Conny that she should give more time and attention to Gertrude, instead of lavishing all upon him.

"Aunt is happy, but is hiding it," Conny insisted. "That's like her, uncle. She's all pride. You ought to know her by this time!"

Almost at that very moment, Gertrude was saying:

"My pride, silly though it was, Justin, used to help me over difficulties. I am not so certain about myself now. There have been many things to weaken me. The coming of Trevor to this house was one. My perpetual lie about his relationship to Conny was another. Then there was Conny's transference of her affection from me to him. And finally, Justin dear——" she hesitated a moment, and finished with an effort: "I am afraid that I have been of very little help to you."

He fairly leaped from his seat.

"How can you speak that way?" he cried. "You can't mean it! Don't tell me that again, or I will say that it is *I* who am disappointing *you!* That is it! It is I who have been the failure! I promised so much—and am still empty-handed!"

He was deathly pale now. Gertrude had also risen to her feet, but she sought to keep some control over herself.

"If you continue to talk in that strain, I will surely not forgive you!" she warned.

There was a tense moment. The ring of the telephone broke the suspense. The call proved to be from Mrs. Craigie, who asked if they could come over after dinner. Justin and Gertrude swiftly exchanged glances; and then Gertrude hesitated long enough to allow Mrs. Craigie to guess that the two wished to have their evening alone.

When Gertrude hung up the receiver, Justin said, "She wants us as much for Lenny as for herself. He has been brooding about his shortcomings, when there are really none worth talking about. The people who have real problems are usually older than twenty. Anyhow, he's too sensitive to be happy in the practice of law. I am going to bring pressure to bear on his mother about that."

It was this very question about Lenny's sensitiveness as related to his future in law which his mother was constantly debating. At an unexpected moment she said to him:

"Suppose you were to round out your education thoroughly before you actually settled down to a profession. You have never really gotten a good education——"

"But I have gotten to know the world better during these two years of life among men," he interposed. "Could there be anything more fortunate than that for a young fellow?"

"Yes, there could be something more fortunate," said his

mother. "It is to discover just what will make one most happy for an entire lifetime. I would not be surprised if some day you came to me and confessed that you had been mistaken about your choice of law; that you had found an aptitude for something else which would give you more joy. Then would come the moment when you would shake off all your doubts, and would rise to the full height of your ability! I am watching and waiting for that time. Your unrest would cease then!"

Lenny stared at the frail woman sitting quietly before him. He cried in warning, "Mother, you believe me finer than I am!" in a voice which struggled with anger. It almost drove him to tear the veil from her eyes, brutal as that might have been.

She merely smiled. To hide his despair, he seized some flowers from a vase near-by, and with a forced smile scattered them over her. Then they laughed together because the flowers proved quite wet. But his laughter halted abruptly when he stiffened under the effect of a sharp nervous tremor which shot through his body. He gripped a chair to steady himself. It was all too brief to be noticed by his mother.

At the shore, she set out to fight his moodiness by insisting that he should get about a great deal. This was speedily to be realized, for he chanced upon a former classmate who hailed from the Middle West. When, however, the latter proposed that they hunt up "a few good fellows and a game," Lenny did not leap at the chance.

"The last hand of poker I played was on the banks of the St. Lawrence with Grosse," he said. "We weren't brilliant at it."

"Well, you won't find us so, either!" said the other. "It's just to while away an evening. I know two or three

chaps who would enjoy a game if it was merely social and we weren't stuck on making money out of each other. I'm going to count you in!"

Lenny was too eager to escape the monotony of the life he was leading to offer further objections; although between that time and the hour when they assembled in the hotel room of the one who had suggested the game he was several times on the brink of withdrawing, but was lured on by the prospect of spending several exciting hours.

A bellboy traveled to that room many times with liquor. It was close to sunrise before Lenny got away. He had telephoned his mother early in the evening; so he was enabled to delay returning to his hotel without worrying her. The liquor he had drunk made it hard for him to find his way easily through the streets. When he staggered into bed, he was too helpless to take off his clothes.

The sun was quite high before, in answer to his mother's knock, he awoke. He asked in a sleepy voice to be allowed to have another hour, and dropped dizzily back into bed. On finally awakening, he was greeted by a racking headache. His mother mistook the signs of dissipation for drowsiness, and smiled when Mrs. Mulholland made a remark about "sowing one's wild oats."

"Well, the seashore is a mighty strange place for agriculture!" said Lenny.

When he came back to take stock of his money, he found his original sum increased by fifty dollars.

For a time he was disgusted. Then he laughed weakly. In the end, the night's doings bore a pleasurable aspect since they had disposed of a great deal of time very quickly.

"All those fellows were of good family," he hastened to defend the dissipation in reply to his conscience. "A few

drinks and a congenial game in a social way won't necessarily spell my undoing."

It seemed a relief to let it go at that, and the argument was carried no further.

He tried to do some work on his manuscript, but fell asleep over the pages. His attempt to finish the doze in his room was interrupted by a telephone call. It proved to be an invitation to repeat his previous evening's luck at cards.

"I am spending my afternoon taking naps," he said. "How about to-morrow?"

"Need two days to recuperate after a mild affair like ours?" came over the wire.

"Looks that way," Lenny replied. "And it'll take me two days to count over what I have won from you fellows."

This brought the laugh he had expected. After he hung up the receiver, he shrank back in disgust from the thought of his part in that morning's dissipation. He decided upon a courteous, yet firm, refusal should the invitation be repeated.

At dinner Mrs. Mulholland took care to personally place a letter from Conny beside his plate, with a ceremonious bow. When Lenny ignored the letter, she broke out:

"If Conny wasn't so charitable, some people would be less conceited! Let us hope some *real* man will make her happy—mighty soon, too!"

"Let us hope so," he echoed carelessly.

" 'None but the brave deserves the fair,' " Mrs. Mulholland followed up the attack.

"Trust her to find that out!" Lenny exclaimed.

"Spoken like a brave man!" came mockingly.

"Who was it that said, 'He who fights and runs away, may live to fight another day?' " asked Lenny.

"Don't boast of being all legs and no heart!" cried Mrs. Mulholland.

Resentful that the talk should have become so direct, Lenny announced:

"The game is called!"

When he was out of the way, Mrs. Mulholland complained to his mother, "If he would only flirt—or make a fool of himself like a real live young fellow!"

"Don't you see he is far from happy because he believes he has done nothing else but make a fool of himself?" said his mother.

That night Lenny smoked himself into a fit of loneliness on the beach, and determined never again to spend such tormenting hours, even if he had to go back to the card-players. Such a course looked ridiculous on the following morning. But the day dragged again, and in the mental fog in which he moved in his nervous weariness, he sought out his companions of the previous night, his pride and resistance, for the time being, at the zero point.

Following this, for three nights in succession his hour of return was pushed far into the morning. His mother soon began to wonder what time he did come back. Vague fears prompted her to go to his room on the fourth night, and to wait up for him.

As midnight came and went, she only shook her head indulgently, mindful of the fact that he was no longer a boy, and then continued her reading of the magazine she had brought with her. When one o'clock showed on the time-piece on his bureau, she grew visibly anxious. At two she was no longer reading.

Suddenly she started as a fearful thought struck her. Had he kept similar late hours on other occasions, and lied to her about it? As she dwelt on his disinclination to

rise early, and his fagged air even with this additional sleep, the probability that he was dissipating seemed certain, and she was almost suffocated by her grief.

A little past three there was a fumbling at the door, in a peculiar manner, which she could not understand as the hall was well lighted, even at that hour. A hand moved the knob, and the key which struck the key-hole frequently appeared very unsteady. Mrs. Craigie hastily went to the door, less fearful of intruders than of Lenny in a state of extreme weariness. What else could that groping mean?

The door opened before she could lay her hand on it. She was about to speak, in order to keep Lenny from starting when he came in. Speech, however, was abruptly halted by the way in which he staggered into the room. She cried out when she saw that he was drunk, and remained rooted where she stood, her hands on her heart.

As the knowledge of who was in the room slowly dawned upon Lenny's clouded mind, he made an effort to straighten himself, but he only saved himself from falling by seizing a chair for support. The sight of his mother sobered him slightly. He was able to find his tongue to say:

"Dear mamsy, it's funny, isn't it, your stayin' up for me!"

He hiccoughed and grinned foolishly at her. Then he made for the bed, but found a chair a half-way road to it, and dropped into the seat with a thud. His eyes were almost closed now.

"Lenny!" cried his mother in agony.

Her distress aroused him. Starting up with an unsteady gesture, he said:

"Go to bed, mamsy, dear. You know I've got a right to go out with the boys. Yes, mamsy, it's right. Ain't I

grown up? Sure! Now go to bed like a good fellow. It's awfully late. You ain't strong either, you know."

He was sobering fast.

"Made lots of friends—just like you wanted me to," he told her, conscious, despite his very helpless state, of his need of squaring himself. "Fine boys. Go to bed, now, mamsy, or there won't be any night left to go to sleep in."

Then a very strange thing happened. Walking over to him, his mother first gazed sternly into his tipsy face. Then she seized him, and shook him with all her strength, her eyes blazing.

His jaw dropped with astonishment. He sobered sufficiently to catch his mother as she collapsed. Staring at the inert figure in his arms he tried to comprehend what had happened.

"Mamsy!" he cried. "Say you're all right! Say there's nothing the matter! O God! I haven't killed you, have I? Talk to me, mamsy! Talk to me! Say something!"

"Help me to my room," she whispered.

"No! no!" he said. "Just lie down here for a few moments!"

"No, you had better take me to my room," she told him.

When he did so, and had laid her upon her bed, he knelt beside it and gazed at her with frightened eyes.

"I wish I had died on my way here!" he finally said, his voice choked with sobs.

"You forget that you are all I have," she replied.

"Mother," he said, covering his face with his hands, "why should you not marry Colonel Henderson?"

"You insult me!" she exclaimed in a voice of decided

anger, sitting up. "You cannot respect me or yourself when you seek to evade responsibility in this way!"

"I—I beg your pardon," he said, in a strange, quiet voice. "I suppose I *am* the sort of fellow who tries to escape responsibilities. That is the whole trouble. I'm not really worth your love. I'm just a weak fool; nothing more. That's the reason I am thoughtless about you—and about myself."

This was too much for his mother. She reached out her arms and held him close; and the next moment they were both crying like children.

He was the first to speak.

"Don't, mamsy!" he begged. "You're breaking my heart! Oh, you've got to forgive me this time! Perhaps the real trouble is you can't do anything else but forgive me! If you would only rage at me! If you would only be harsh and tell me that I have disappointed you, and that you are ashamed of me, and done with me! Dear mamsy, you're no mamsy at all! You're just the softest-souled person in all the world! A dear person who should have had a daughter—like Conny—instead of a son like me."

"You will not find me so lenient or soft again unless you promise never to mention Colonel Henderson's name as you mentioned it to-night," she said, almost entreatingly.

He was not glad when he promised. He was afraid of the future. Then he wondered why she had not exacted another promise from him; why she was now ignoring his return that morning in a drunken condition.

"If she would but mistrust me!" he mentally exclaimed.

He looked at the frail figure, and a strong detestation of himself swept up through his being. He stood off, as if afraid that his touch would defile her.

"My dear boy, it is very late," she reminded him as he stood staring ahead, his head on his breast.

He started.

"Yes, I have been keeping you from sleep," he said. He came to her, and took her hand. "I am sure you won't have to worry about my late hours after this," he told her. "Nor about my drinking. I know you won't."

A tremor shot through her. She whispered, "Your voice just then brought your father vividly before me. Oh, Lenny, remember that it is *you* who will have to make my way smooth in the years ahead of me!"

He soothed her with stumbling, tender words. As he left the room, all his grief for the occurrence of the last few hours summed itself up in the thought:

"If I were reasonably sure that I could smooth my own way during those years!"

CHAPTER XIII

For some days Lenny did not appear in the rooms of his card-loving acquaintances. But there came an afternoon when he smoked himself into a resigned frame of mind, and surrendered to his craving for the racket, the talk, and the excitement of the card table. He met somewhat shame-facedly the uproar which greeted him. However, when drinks were ordered in his honor, he insisted:

"I am going to cut out cocktails and highballs, boys. Also late hours. That may sound goody-goody, but I've got a nervous mother at the other end of the route. Now grin, the lot of you!"

No one "grinned;" so he was almost reconciled to his return. He promised to increase still further the number who came to the "game." He was able to do this because his mother had been seeking out her women friends, so that their male relatives might be added to Lenny's circle of acquaintances. Little did she dream that she was helping to recruit players for "select" card parties.

About this time Lenny suggested an increase in his allowance. His mother freely opened her pocketbook to him. She also spoke of turning over to him some real estate, that he might be placed on a more independent footing. Not a suspicion of the play in which he was indulging crossed her mind. His hours were regular enough now,

and his drinking was not sufficiently in evidence to be noticeable.

"I know you are having an enjoyable summer at last," she said.

"Look at the bushels of acquaintances you have gotten for me!" he replied evasively. Then he hesitatingly said, "But they can certainly spend money!"

"I will not have you go to the other extreme by not spending anything at all!" she told him. "You must know no cares this summer!" She added, "I have not seen you look so well for some time,"—deceived by his tan.

"You, mamsy, are radiantly beautiful!" he said in return, smiling at her, although his heart was sick within him at the part he was playing.

As he stood there, apparently cheerful, his mother was happy. She noted with satisfaction—not for the first time—that he had grown to be taller than she, with a slimness which gave him an appearance beyond his regular height. His black hair was thrown back carelessly from his broad forehead, beneath which the brown eyes looked out thoughtfully and wistfully.

Uneasy under her gaze, he suddenly began to talk about his book of brave men's exploits. His time away from the card table, when he was not drowsing on the beach, was occupied with this manuscript.

Occasionally he would drop into a barroom with his newly acquired acquaintances. He took care to order only the mildest drinks, and listened with amazement to the unmanly gossip and small talk of supposedly important people. This, however, was more bearable than their stories, which made him ashamed when he left the atmosphere of the barrooms.

"Ah, well, they all tell them," he reflected. "The old fellows are just as bad as the young."

He did not hide from himself the fact that the gaming table was a considerable strain on his nervous system. Try as he might, he could not master the trembling of his hands when cards were being dealt out to him. It put him in mind of the several betting days at the baseball games, when each throwing-motion of the pitcher's arm was like a shock.

He had expected that by playing long enough, he would overcome the strain he felt during the dealing of cards. But his nervousness on every occasion almost paralyzed him. This did not grow out of his fear of losing. Money had never been a ruling passion with him. He was satisfied to find that his winnings and losses balanced each other throughout the summer. This was mainly due to the careless manner in which the others, except in one or two instances, played.

A letter which disturbed him greatly came to him toward the end of summer. It was from Conny, who wrote:

"All you say sounds strange, and not at all like you. You seem to have changed an awful lot. If it was anybody else, I would say it was a case of conceit. But I couldn't be that unfair to you. It isn't that you've grown older. You simply don't seem to remember about us. You write as if somebody had dictated the letter to you. What's more, not once do you mention the league! It's all so queer! I seem to have let go of your hand. In fact, I'm getting to feel that I'd rather you didn't write at all!"

A subsequent letter demolished all his resentment. Conny wound up, after a string of whimsical trifles, by saying, "I am eager to have a look at you. That's the reason I'm wishing summer was over!"

He, on the other hand, regarded with gloom its approaching end. To offset the chance of a dull fall and winter, he secured a number of addresses from those whom he had met at the card table. The changing character of the circle there had brought him in contact with men of all walks of life. It surprised him how easily they forgot their different social stations when they dealt each other card-hands. Whether some of them would be as cordial to him in the city, he could not tell.

When he made no mention of his plans for the future to his mother, she was happy to think that his summer had occupied him to the exclusion of everything else.

"Once he gets back to Germantown he will be clamoring to start right in again on his law work!" she told herself. "Let him have his holiday!"

When on his return home he still persisted in being silent about his plans, his mother did not press the matter.

"At last," she reasoned, "he has learned to bide his time! Contact with older men has taught him patience."

During his first days he found considerable relief in the quiet of the Germantown streets after the shore's uproar. His trips past the Breen home were taken without any misgivings; Conny was not to be back for two weeks.

The mirror in his room showed him that he had changed much. There were lines about his mouth and eyes. At first glance, any observer would have said his age was twenty-eight. Only the fact that his mother saw him constantly kept her from noting these changes.

After a week, he said to her, "I am so anxious about that book, that I am going to give a month to it before you pick out some law office for me to enter. That's the reason I haven't talked law."

"Since the writing of the book will be a valuable train-

ing, I want you to take all the time you need, dear," was her reply.

His search for material with which to finish the manuscript took him to libraries; but he often changed his route, and went to the closing games of the professional baseball clubs instead. Here his system of "betting on pitchers" brought him some winnings. There was no opportunity of going to the games of his own league, for its season had closed some time before.

When the professional baseball season came to an end, he fell into the habit of wandering into fashionable cafés, where he would order wine and listen to the music. At one of these cafés he encountered a man whom he had met at the shore. Lenny was effusive in his greeting, although he remembered that this man was the most pronounced gambler at the card parties.

"You look bored, Craigie," came in silken tones. "If you have time on your hands, there's something interesting in the poker line not a thousand miles from here."

"I'm too dull for a game to-day," said Lenny.

"Well, perhaps I have something for you still more interesting than that," persisted his acquaintance, extending his cigarette-case.

"You must really believe I am bored!" Lenny laughed.

"You weren't trying to hide the fact, you know," was the reply. Then the man leaned over and whispered, "Millionaires may have their stock market, and may play at buying on margin. As for the rest of us, there's something just as good, which doesn't need any more apology than Wall Street. Have you ever seen a bucketshop? It will appeal to any one who knows anything about stocks, or wants to learn about them."

Graham was the man's name, and he carried himself

well, and had an air of breeding. Lenny might not have paid much attention to his offer to guide him through a bucketshop; but the thought that Maur was interested in stocks influenced him, and after a moment of hesitation he went along.

The bucketshop hardly proved terrifying. On one wall was a list of stocks, alongside of which various numbers were changed from time to time. There was a flashily dressed cashier, several assistants, and many "customers." These last stared fixedly at the changing numbers. Every now and then one of them would utter an exclamation. Those who were successful appeared to be in the minority. There was the rattle of small coin. The number of customers changed as frequently as the figures on the board. Despite this, everything wore a furtive air.

"I guess I've had enough for one day," said Lenny. "I suppose I can come in whenever I want to, eh?"

"I can fix that all right," said his guide; and proceeded to introduce him to the man who watched the door.

On leaving the building, Graham hastened to overcome what scruples the visit to the bucketshop might have aroused in Lenny's mind.

"I know it's gambling," said the older man. "But it isn't any more dishonest than the stock market. And you'll have the one as long as you have the other. As for the sort of people who were in that place—they didn't look disreputable, did they? Certainly not! They are small merchants, clerks, and professional men. And they have a right there, too! I can't see why the law should discriminate against the bucketshop and not against the stock exchange! I'm against laws that take away the liberty of the people. That's not mob talk, either! I'm a college-bred man, and my people had money. So I'm hardly of

the mob. If you feel like finding out whether you've got a good knowledge of the stock market, go to the bucketshop. It's less costly than the stock exchange."

Lenny was yet to learn that Graham had an interest in the undertaking. But after the lengthy defense of the bucketshop, the well-groomed, courteous man was ready to drop the subject, and to inquire whether his companion would join in "a quiet hand," which was played in an office-building in the very heart of the city.

"You'll find politicians, lawyers, business men, and even doctors there," said Graham. "It won't hurt you to get acquainted. Surprised at my knowledge of things, are you?" he asked with a smile. "I'm what they call a man-about-town. If *I* introduce you there, it will be all right. As a rule, they steer clear of strangers."

The class of men around the card-table in the office building proved to be an improvement over those in the bucketshop. They received Lenny through the cloud of tobacco smoke with half-friendly nods. He came into the game for a few minutes, and played with reckless bravado, which brought him some winnings and the increased respect of those present. Then excusing himself, on the plea of an engagement, he slipped away.

Once out of reach of the habitués of the card-table, his conscience rose against him in self-accusation. The struggle which followed was too much for his nervous state of mind. He flung off his remorse by offering the argument:

"I am learning to know men, and am getting close to human nature. Those are acquaintances worth having. I must not be a snob!"

He continued his belated walk to the library, only to find

on his arrival there, that the excitement of the afternoon had left him unfit for work.

During the sleepless night which followed—a not unusual occurrence with him of late—he dealt himself imaginary card-hands without number. The next morning was gray with rain, and Lenny, depressed, hastened back to the company of the gamblers. He played for an entire afternoon, while the circle about the table kept changing. Once he mentioned Mahan's name to a politician who sat at his elbow.

"Who? Justin Mahan?" came abruptly in reply. "He's traveling pretty fast—backwards!"

"No, he'll never make good—even though he has money," said another who had overheard the remark.

"Getting so cranky lately, he's not fit for decent company," said a third. "He's about due to blossom into one of those mushroom reformers."

Afterwards Lenny saw the folly of mentioning Justin's name in such a place, since it might, in a roundabout way, bring the card-playing to the ears of those in Germantown. He lived in great fear of this for a week, until he met Justin, who shook his hand warmly, and scolded him for not coming up to the office. Justin's talk showed that the card-playing crowd was not in the habit of repeating what it heard while gaming.

Although Lenny's scruples about what he was doing did not cease to torment him, he did not discontinue his playing. Again and again he promised himself to stop; only to go back to the stale atmosphere of tobacco and perspiring men. He spent many sleepless hours asking himself what fascination there could be in tremblingly watching how the cards fell. His wearied brain was too bewildered to attempt an answer. Instead, he got out of the difficulty

by dwelling on the fact that men high in finance, who gave money to churches, colleges and charity, also gambled—on the race-track, during trips across the ocean, and at their clubs.

He claimed that he was only "sowing his wild oats," and that in a short time he would be done with gambling. But he kept on going; and he began to pay visits to the bucket-shop. Although careful at first about the men with whom he talked, he soon drew no line about his associates. He had no doubt that there were crooks among those whom he met at the bucketshop. But very soon his surroundings, instead of revolting him, grew to have a fascination, which he made no effort to resist.

He lied to his mother about what took him to town. He believed that if she knew the truth it would kill her. So he refrained from telling her—just as he concealed his sleeplessness and his general ill-health.

One day he discovered what he considered an important excuse for the life he was leading.

"The reason Justin has been a failure is because he don't understand the man in the crowd," he argued. "He isn't democratic enough. He wants to pull them off their feet, instead of walking alongside of them until he gets what he wants. That explains his failure. I shall have easier sailing in politics!"

This seemed reasonable; and he went out of his way to treat every one as an equal, although there were many men, both in the bucketshop and at the card-table, whose nearness filled him with disgust. Among these were white-faced and white-fingered young fellows, always carefully attired, who were credited with being "dope-fiends" or users of drugs. And they were never without cigarettes in their mouths.

Several of them were noticeably consumptive. Lenny soon saw that the disease had a hold upon others about him, in the main those who indulged in "chain-smoking,"—a fact which did not escape Lenny's naturally observant eye.

During periods of depression he allowed himself to wonder how morphine or opium would affect him. On one occasion when one of his repulsive acquaintances—who was unquestionably a user of drugs—invited him "to come along for a little fun," Lenny happened to be struggling with a racking headache, and his will-power was at low ebb. Before he knew what he was doing, he had accepted the invitation. But by the time he had walked a little distance, he had a revulsion of feeling, and hastily said:

"No, I can't go along. I—I have an appointment. Some other time, if you please!"

And he hurried off in an opposite direction.

Then he realized the enormity of what he had escaped. He had to lean against a wall to fight the mental and physical sickness which engulfed him. Vertigo sapped the remainder of his strength. He never remembered how he got home. When he reached his room, he was thankful that his mother was not in the house. He crawled into bed, shivering as if with the ague.

By dinner time his nerves had steadied somewhat. The night, however, brought him a succession of curious dreams which added to the horror of that day. In the first one his father stood before him, clad in his uniform, holding out his hands pleadingly. There was a look of entreaty in his sad eyes, and appeal was evident in every line of his slim figure.

Lenny awoke with a cry, his body bathed in perspiration. Then he lay very still, unable to believe that he had slept, for his father's living presence had never been more real

than this dream one. But fatigue conquered his fears, and he dozed again.

Again the Captain came, this time his head swathed in bandages—as he must have appeared during the hours following his wonderful exploit on the Niagara. He held his sword in his hand, and his whole attitude was one of command. His eyes seemed to flash as he looked at Lenny.

The latter leaped out of bed, and almost with the same motion turned up the light. He was struggling for breath, and his body was deathly cold. Despite this, his mind was in a heated, frenzied whirl. He lighted a cigarette with shaking fingers, and sought to steady his unstrung nerves by trying to laugh. The attempt was a dismal failure. Sleep appeared out of the question now; but after a time, Lenny essayed it, with the light turned up quite high.

His father came yet again. This time he looked waxen, and dead, and stared at his son out of sightless eyes. His appearance spelled death so plainly that the sleeper moaned and tossed about to get out of range of the inert figure and its terrible stare. The figure remained fixed before him, until Lenny, with a cry, sprang to the floor.

He was thankful for the light. Afraid of dropping off to sleep again, he limply sought a chair. Soon he was attempting to face facts as he had not faced them for some time, and for the first time in days he sought to get an idea of what his gambling had cost him in dollars and cents.

As he began to figure, he grew frightened. His winnings had dwindled, while his losses had kept steadily mounting. Borrowing had been comparatively easy at first. When it did not supply his needs fast enough he had pawned some of his jewelry.

Against these continual losses he had set up the hope of

finally proving a winner in a big way. That his losses might be a reason for leaving gambling alone did not enter his head. His whole passion now was to win back the sums he had spent at the card-table.

As he sat under the light and hastily cast up the long row of figures, he was glad, in a measure, that his mother had not hurried the transfer of the houses to him. These, too, might have been swept away by his gambling. He quailed before the thought.

"Oh, it's going to be all right!" he exclaimed. "A week of luck will wipe out the losses. Then I'll quit!"

The next moment he was despondent again. Conny had come into his thoughts.

"No, I mustn't go to see her," he moaned. "She is right not to bother about me any more. I don't deserve her friendship. What use could she have for a man like me? What is going to become of me?"

He felt himself doomed. He seemed to be slipping so fast that it appeared useless to put out a hand to stop the slide. This was not, of course, consistent with his notion that he was merely "sowing his wild oats." But his mind had lost the habit of following out regular lines of thought. He was only aware that he had thrown compass overboard. It was only in such a moment as this that he allowed himself to see the doom written along the road he was traveling.

In his despair he demanded, "Why should mother have trusted me? Why doesn't she guess? How wrong of her to have so much faith! It isn't because I lied. She takes everything for granted! When I lost interest in the league, she never said anything. She isn't pressing me about my law work. Oh, it is all wrong! And I can't tell her! I haven't the courage!"

His mind reverted to the three dreams. The more he dwelt upon them, the more they frightened him. He relived the visions many times before dawn came.

"Get out West!" was the message of the first glimmer of light.

But he shook his head. He knew that the West contained numerous gambling hells; and his smoking would still continue. The possibility of going there only to be lost altogether, appalled him.

He was overwhelmed with grief. Flinging himself on the bed, he buried his head in the pillows, and cried as if his heart would break. Had his mother entered the room at that moment, he would have made a clean breast of his wrong-doing, even at the risk of losing both her love and respect.

Then he lay very still, his body feverish and aching. He was sure that he would not be able to get up that morning. His tired eyes took in the last signs of Indian summer outside the windows, and, without knowing why, he counted the few remaining leaves on one of the trees. The sudden chirp of a sparrow near the window was too much for his strained nerves, and he cried again.

His eye could not avoid the many cigarette stumps on the bureau. He cursed them, loudly, madly, and grated his teeth at them like a wild man. Then his young body, overtaxed, surrendered itself to sleep.

With the breakfast bell, his years once more asserted themselves. He put out of his mind the night of pain, the tears, and the strange dreams. As he looked into the mirror while he was making his toilet, he was at a loss to understand how the man who was reflected there had come to feel like a boy.

"I'll recover all I've lost. Then I'll chuck the whole

crowd and the playing!" he promised himself. "That will be the end of it! It's worry that's hammering my nerves; and the cigarettes aren't helping, either!"

In his attempt that week to win back everything, he found himself only sinking deeper into debt. The lines on his face grew more pronounced. He spent sleepless nights in endless calculation of ways out of his money tangles.

The need of money sapped the remnant of his will-power. He played on, frantically, desperately, consuming hundreds of cigarettes as he hung over the card-table. More than once he was on the verge of confessing everything to his mother. But he shrank from the ordeal. Instead he kept up the lie about his visits to the libraries.

One day he caught sight of Maur, in Philadelphia, but by hurried flight got out of that man's way without being seen. He was not so fortunate on a second occasion, when Maur came up behind him in Germantown, and tapped him on the shoulder, saying loudly as he did so, "Ah, I've got you at last, old chap!"

Hate welled into Lenny's heart as he looked at the smiling man, who was regarding him with his head slightly cocked; and when the latter offered his hand, it was not taken.

"Glad to see you," went on the young stock broker pleasantly, overlooking Lenny's refusal to shake hands. "I thought you were going to hunt me up! Too busy, eh? I am laying off a bit, just to rest up. Oh, I do need a rest once in a while, so don't laugh at that!" He ignored the fact that Lenny was not laughing. "I know it sounds funny for a fellow with my health to pretend that he needs to lay up for repairs. It won't harm, though. My partner—the best a fellow could have—is taking care of things.

We've done splendidly. Say, I'm awfully glad to see you, Leonard."

He waited for the latter to reply. Finding only silence and a chilly exterior where he had expected to be greeted at least courteously, he broke out:

"Look here, if you've heard anybody say that I took customers away from my father, you can tell them for me that it is a lie!" The accusation was news to Lenny, but he did not show any surprise. "It is true that I am not living with my father now," went on Maur, greatly excited. "But that's because we never agreed—which is nobody's affair but ours! The lies that the gossips work up are rotten! Why, they say you have gone to the bad! What do you think of that, eh? You ought to punch somebody's head! It's a nasty thing to lay up to a fellow! But they're spreading it, all right!"

Lenny was stunned by this.

"Why, that's worse than a lie!" he cried furiously. "It's a crooked attempt to harm me!"

"Of course it is!" said Maur, in a very earnest manner.

Neither of them doubted the charge against the other. The word of sympathy which Maur let fall, however, came at a time when Lenny was starved for something of the kind, even though he mistrusted its source. Offering Maur a cigarette, he lighted a fresh one himself. His hands, Maur noted, shook. The two walked down the street together.

"You're right about the way people gossip here," said Lenny. "But it's not easy to punch everybody's head in the hope of reaching the right one. I'm too busy just now to worry about the remarks of my enemies. I'm preparing to enter the offices of Wright & Simpson. They are friends

of mother, and want me to go through the preliminaries with them, so that I may get into the firm in time."

Here Maur mentally remarked, "There was only one lawyer when you last spoke to me. You're a poor hand at lying."

Lenny was relating, "After I am admitted to the bar, I'll go in for corporation law. Sounds like brag, I guess. But those are my plans. It would be queer if I were to be of use to you at some time, wouldn't it?"

Maur thought, without saying so, "It would be queer!"

"As for my going to the bad," went on Lenny, "well, some puritan must have seen me coming home at midnight. Which don't explain why *he* was out at that hour, eh? But joking aside, it's an awful place for keeping friendships alive! What have I ever done to deserve this slander?"

"Oh, I have known for a long time the sort of people we have here!" said Maur. "Anyhow, we've got something in common at last! So it is about time we buried the hatchet, old man."

"I am beginning to feel that way about it myself," replied Lenny, his tone warmer and less suspicious.

Then he became limp and nerveless as the possibility of getting a loan from Maur suggested itself. In order to arrive at such a point with a clear conscience, he allowed all his hostility towards the one-time bully to vanish. This was easily accomplished after he had inwardly remarked, several times, "I haven't been fair to him. He has been changing for the better."

Maur interrupted his talk about the methods of Wall Street to ask:

"Wasn't there considerable property to come to you at twenty-one?"

"Under dad's will, everything went to mother," said

Lenny. "But she has decided to turn some houses over to me. They'll be a help. There's nothing like an independent income."

"No, nothing like it!" echoed Maur.

"And I need the additional money," said Lenny, "although I've been keeping within limits. A meal at a first-class restaurant is an item. So is a box at the theater. And friends have a habit of being short themselves, and feel hurt if the 'touch' don't work right. I haven't joined any clubs yet; but that will be an additional tax. All of which must be a bit stale to you, Bob."

"Oh, I got my education in that some time ago!" Maur replied. He added in the friendliest of tones, "Say, if you happen to be short, I'll be offended if you don't speak out. I am plentifully supplied with cash just now. There's lots of it. And you needn't be in any hurry to repay it, either."

Had Lenny known the malignancy of spirit which was behind the offer, he would have struck at the man before him. Instead, his heart beat loudly, and he found speech difficult. When he averted his head almost shamefacedly, Maur exclaimed:

"It's nonsense for you to hesitate just because it's I! It isn't fair to me! You are mistrusting me again——"

"I am not!" protested Lenny.

"I'll take your word for it," said Maur. "As for being short, why, that's liable to happen to any man. Of course, it didn't happen to us when we were younger!" he added with a laugh.

"Bob," said Lenny, his voice breaking, "do you know you oughtn't to think of doing me a favor? I've harbored the unfairest notions about you! Even when I was sick, and you were so fine about coming to see me, mind you! I'm heartily ashamed of myself! I understand now how

easy it is for a fellow to have enemies for no reason at all! I have been disgustingly unfair toward you!"

"What difference does it make as long as it's all right now?" cried Maur. "Here—shake—and forget it, old man!"

They clasped hands warmly. Lenny said, "I am glad I met you to-day! Think of having gone around for months with that opinion of you! It isn't too late to get a thing like that right!"

"Fortunately not!" replied Maur. "Now that we've cleared that up, you must come to see me. I'm staying at 'The Elms.' Hunt me up any time. But suppose you put your absurd pride aside, and tell me if I can't advance you a little money. Oh, I know you wouldn't ask for it after confessing that you had made a mistake about me! That wouldn't be like you!"

He had stopped near a turn in the street, and had drawn out a wallet. Lenny's self-control oozed away when he saw the money it contained.

"Oh, I'd want a hundred at least," he said, trying to smile. "You couldn't advance that conveniently, so let's not talk about it any more."

"Why, of course I can let you have a hundred!" Maur hastened to assure him. "Or two hundred if you needed it!"

"Only on one condition—that I give you an I O U for the money," Lenny insisted.

"If you want to be stubborn about it—certainly." And Maur handed him a fountain pen and one of his cards, on the back of which Lenny wrote out his indebtedness in a faltering hand.

The hundred dollars was soon stowed away in his pocket. Lenny did not see the look of satisfaction which shone for

an instant in Maur's eyes as he put back the wallet. That look declared:

"You, Leonard Craigie, have been delivered into my hands!"

Lenny said, "I will repay you soon. Do you know, the odd part of the whole thing is that if somebody had told me I would meet you to-day, and would let you loan me a hundred dollars, I would have laughed at the idea! It's a queer way for us to start out in our friendship, isn't it, Bob?"

"As good as any!" said the latter. "Why not? But let's not speak of it any more. You're to come and see me soon. Mind you, no excuses!"

They shook hands again, and separated. Lenny looked after the retreating figure with a feeling of wonder for the way in which a few moments had cleared up years of misunderstanding. Suddenly a shadow of misgiving fell athwart his satisfaction. His head went back with distrust. But he checked himself, and protested:

"There's my unfairness again! I'm vile! It's only prejudice and stubbornness! I've always believed the worst of him—because of the ease with which he always got things, I suppose. As if that should make any difference! No, I've never taken the right view of him!"

Another fact stood out as an important outcome of this meeting:

"You have some money now. You may use part of it to redeem the articles you have pawned."

He knew that it would only be a matter of a few days before his mother would note the absence of his watch, his rings, his scarfpins, his silver-backed brushes, and other personal belongings of value. "A few of these must come back at once," he decided.

Then he grieved at the readiness with which he had accepted the loan from Maur.

"But didn't Bob himself say I wouldn't have borrowed the money unless I honestly believed in our friendship?" he sought to override his sensitiveness.

Greatly wearied by this questioning, he put his pride aside, and made ready to go into town to recover some of the pawned valuables. On the journey thither, he deducted twenty dollars, which were to be used the next day at the gaming table in the attempt to bring a change of luck.

Maur had guessed as much, and his afternoon was one of amusement and great happiness.

"Oh, I don't intend to stand in the way of our good boy's bad habits!" he gloated. "If a few hundred dollars will hasten his slide to the bottom, so much the better. He was destined for it, anyhow. And the sooner he is found out, the better. Conny will be able to make comparisons between me and him when the explosion takes place, and her saint is proved to be a very ordinary mortal with several ugly vices."

He realized that to escape being charged with hastening Lenny's downfall he would have to move carefully.

"I will always be able to say that I wanted to help him," he reflected. "The date of my I O U will prove that I loaned him the money after he had started on his downward career."

He wondered, "Does he use 'dope'? His mother's affection is a pretty dangerous thing when it shuts its eyes to his condition! What a chalk-face! Trembling hands, unsteady jaw—How the world does move in a few years! And in a few more—who can tell? If he made some inexcusable mistake, Conny would never forgive herself for believing in him. From the looks of things, he ought to

turn up for a loan in about a week or so. No one ever said Robert Maur wasn't a good waiter. And I can now patiently watch the tobogganing of Mr. Leonard Craigie to disgrace."

CHAPTER XIV

Within two weeks Lenny went to "The Elms." The beggar was in his eye and bearing; but in the shadows cast by the pretty hoods of Maur's electric lamps, he looked the Leonard Craigie of old.

Maur pushed a comfortable chair toward him, and passed him cigarettes, which were somewhat better than the brands Lenny had been using of late in his attempts to economize. The odor of the expensive cigarettes, the warmth, cosiness, and luxury of his surroundings, sapped the last vestiges of his power of resistance. Maur, in his feeling of mastery, was ready to play with him as a cat plays with a mouse. If Maur had been asked why he was devoid of pity, he would not have spoken of revenge. He would have said that it gave him pleasure to mock at a failure.

Remembering their school day feuds and Lenny's pride, Maur was tempted to laugh in his face. He could not assume the cordiality which he had shown on their last meeting. Instead his attitude was one of superiority.

"Your health doesn't seem to be at the best," he said.

"That's a matter of inheritance," Lenny replied. "There may be a whole lot in a fellow, Bob, that will be against his getting things for himself. In fact, I've been up against it from the start. You know I'm not a quitter. But, to use an athletic term, I don't seem to get second wind when

I need it. You see what I mean, don't you? You don't know how much I have been thinking about my own case!"

"You ought to have left law alone. You're clever enough to have turned your hand to something else," Maur suggested.

Lenny's reply, after the way he had boasted on their last meeting about his intention of doing corporation law, made Maur chuckle inwardly.

"Well, I may go in for writing," Lenny said. "But there is plenty of time. I am not looking too far ahead. And I'm not such a believer in haste as I used to be."

Silence followed. Maur was studying his visitor, and was now able to discern the havoc the few years had worked with Lenny.

"You haven't been worrying about that small sum?" he suddenly asked.

"Well, I tried not to, Bob," returned Lenny. "I've been pulling along pretty well, but I haven't a surplus yet out of which to pay you back. That's what I came to tell you. I'm very sorry. I thought I'd have my debt squared up by now."

"What's the difference?" Maur said with a careless wave of the hand. "What do you say to a little brandy? I've got a bottle that would make a king sit up and take notice. How about a thimbleful? It's awfully good!"

Lenny was equal to a considerable number of thimblesful, and as he sipped the liquor, he talked. He boasted of the number of politicians he knew. He displayed his recently-acquired knowledge of the world. He dwelt at considerable length on his plans for the future. The more he drank the more he talked, with a tendency to jumble words, and to contradict himself.

At an unexpected moment he grew melancholy. He was

soon telling of days spent in fearful worry about money. Before long he was asking for another loan—not at all with the pride which had marked his first request some two weeks previous.

"I can give you another hundred," said Maur, almost inclined, in his disgust, to refuse him the money, and tempted to bring the interview to a sudden finish.

But instead of putting Lenny out of the rooms, he preferred to continue toying with him. The visitor almost wept his thanks when a check was extended to him. In using bank paper instead of currency Maur had a purpose in view. He wanted a proof of Lenny's borrowings which would be more dignified than I O U's, and the checks which the bank would return to him after paying Lenny would serve this purpose.

For an instant he was on the verge of asking, "What would your mother think of this? What would Conny say?" But mentally calling himself a fool, Maur refused to cut short an incident which was giving him so much pleasure. He was also inclined to remember Lenny's temper, the only quality in that man which he respected.

When he finally got rid of his visitor, he laughed heartily at the amusement which Lenny had furnished him.

A few days later he received a letter from Lenny asking for another loan, which he granted, at the same time carefully filing the letter. The request was not worded as humbly as Maur might have desired, but he overlooked this. The next two letters, which followed closely on the heels of the first, were more to his liking, however. They seemed to be written in a spirit of despair.

He was now sure that Lenny was gambling, and on a scale which could only terminate in disaster. With a hy-

pocrisy which surprised even himself, he wrote Lenny as follows in answer to a fourth begging letter:

My Dear Friend—

I have been giving considerable thought to this new request for a loan. It made me pause in my desire to extend a helping hand to you, because I cannot understand what use you can be making of the money.

I don't mind a fellow going the pace somewhat; but you, my dear Lenny, seem to be doing it at breakneck speed—if you will allow a friend to be frank with you.

Now don't you think it was time you slowed up? You ought to!

As one who wishes you well, I am going to refuse your request. If I can be of help in any other way, just say the word.

Try to be fair about my turning you down. Look upon it as an exhibition of friendship by one who signs himself,

Yours most devotedly,

Bob.

"For if there is going to be a big blow-up, I don't want to appear too mixed up in his affairs," Maur said, as he signed the letter he had dictated to his stenographer. "It is time for me to stand from under."

The letter of refusal proved less of a blow to Lenny than Maur had expected it would. In fact, the appeal for money had been written half-heartedly. Lenny had turned to a new source of funds—his mother's jewel box.

When the idea of going to it first presented itself to him, after he had searched among his own remaining things for something to pawn, he stood paralyzed with fear, bathed in a cold sweat. The horror of even giving it a thought was sufficient to keep him from cards that day.

By evening cigarettes played their customary part in

smoking out this display of will-power. Night brought a complete surrender. He eased his conscience by deciding that after he secured the key of the strong box containing the jewel-case, he would take only a few of his mother's valuables. Then he would win back enough money not only to redeem these jewels, but to clear himself entirely of debt. And he would at the same time escape depending upon Maur for help.

"Suppose you lose the money you get by pawning the jewels?" beat through his brain.

He refused to consider the possibility of this, and his weary mind had no difficulty in shutting out the thought of failure. Duty, consideration, affection, hope, ambition, fear, and even despair, had vanished. His brain occupied itself with combinations of cards which would win against all other hands. It did not occupy itself for any length of time with anything else. The world had become a cigarette-fumed place, in which all his actions looked reasonable, and did not matter. There seemed to be nothing ridiculous in setting straight a wrong by another wrong. In the maze in which he found himself, every turn appeared to be a path. When lucid moments came in these hours of degradation, he staved everything off with the remark:

"Things will all come right soon!"

His face masked itself with a smile when he saw his mother off for her shopping trip to Philadelphia on the eventful morning. Mrs. Mulholland, of course, went also. So the coast was clear for his visit to the strong box. But when the abstraction of a few valuable rings had been accomplished, he hardly had sufficient strength to drag himself back to his room.

He pawned the rings at various places in order not to

arouse suspicion, and took care to be carefully attired, for the same reason. During the week which followed, his manner about the house was very subdued. The week saw the complete loss of the money he had borrowed on the rings.

He had counted upon his mother's dislike of show to keep the theft from being discovered. Unless some affair of importance broke in upon her lonely existence, she would not make any visits to her jewel box. So Lenny used the key again and again.

There came a time, however, when he looked at the gap he had created in the box and fell in a faint to the floor. He lay unconscious for many minutes.

As he stumbled to his feet at last, he had enough presence of mind to turn the key in the box. He shambled back to his room, and bathed his head in cold water. Some whisky helped to restore the circulation in his numbed body. Then he locked himself in, and, flinging himself on the bed, tried to think.

"No! No! No more!" he whispered with chattering teeth, as he contemplated the chance of getting money by pitting more jewelry against his ill-luck at cards.

He snatched at the idea of making some use of the houses which were certain to be transferred to him as a Christmas gift. At once this means of redeeming the pawned articles engaged his fevered mind. It was true that either the sale or mortgage of these houses would be impossible, because the agent acting for his mother would be likely to remain in charge of them. But there was a loophole. He could go to the so-called "loan-sharks" who advanced money at high rates of interest. These might be induced to act in secrecy.

"If only mother does not have occasion to go to her

jewel box!" he groaned, appalled as he saw in imagination her discovery of the theft.

For the first time since his father had appeared to him in the succession of strange dreams, he screwed up enough courage to count up his debts. When he had finished adding the sums on his pawn tickets, and the interest which they represented, he fell to pacing the room like a madman. He owed over nineteen hundred dollars. Later he remembered his debts to a host of card-playing acquaintances who were beginning to clamor for their money.

"My God!" he moaned. "What is going to become of me?"

To face his mother with the story of his day-by-day lies, his card-playing, and his thieving, would be to destroy for all time her faith in him, if the blow would not completely wreck her life. Her forgiveness would be a mockery under the circumstances. He felt that after his confession he would have to go away and never see her again.

"It's too late to tell her, anyhow!" he cried. The shame it would bring rose up before him with crushing effect. "Wouldn't it be better to die and end it all?" he asked. But he put that thought aside with a desperate cry of "No! No!"

"I have a month before the houses will be turned over to me," he told himself. "In that time I can get some money together—even from mother. I will have to buy Christmas gifts. I'll let her see the gifts, then I'll return them to the stores, and recover the money. It may not be much, but everything will help. I'll have to see Justin—and Colonel Henderson. This is no time to be proud. Oh, I must find a way! She won't need her jewelry for a long time! There's a chance!"

He walked about, smoking with nervous fury, his brain

a tangle of figures. For several minutes he contemplated flight from the city, that he might not have to enter on any explanations should his mother discover her loss. This plan suggested another. He would work up a clever robbery scene to account for the disappearance of the jewels, in which he would inflict some severe hurt upon himself, to pretend an encounter with an imaginary thief.

It appeared feasible, until he remembered:

"The pawn-shops would give me away! They would be able to describe *me* as the thief!" He added, "Maur would guess the same thing. And mother might, after all, not believe me. My story would be sure to break down at some point. Mother might see some connection between the lost jewelry and my irregular life."

Mistrusting himself he could not believe otherwise than that she should mistrust him. He could not realize that her faith in him which had prompted her to allow him to do as he wished all through the fall, and which never asked for explanations, would blind her to graver things.

He fled from the house before she returned, that he might not face her in his present frame of mind. The late afternoon was cheery and smiling. His way, unintentionally, led him near the Breen home. Already lights were appearing in its windows.

Lenny slackened his pace, tremulous with the longing to go in. What would not a ring of the bell bring? Conny would be wildly happy. Her uncle's greeting would be warm. Gertrude would hasten to make him feel at home. And Justin might be there to slap him on the shoulder, and to gossip about interesting law cases.

"Oh, I don't belong there any more!" Lenny cried. "They are out of my life! What would they say if they knew?"

He could have prayed in his despair. His awful loneliness awed him. It was as if prison walls penned him in. At last he stumbled on down the road. He was forced to throw back his head to fight the threatening tears.

"No, nothing will come right any more," he said. "Nothing! It is too late!"

He returned home in time to find his mother just in from her shopping, sitting under the hall-light in her wraps, reading a letter with evident delight. He could not help noting her almost girlish beauty; but he was too sick at heart to comment upon it. She looked up and said:

"I've got some news for you. But let us keep it for the dinner-table. It is such good news!"

Reaching his room, Lenny bathed his head with cold water to ward off a threatening headache. His stomach was nauseous. He had a craving for some odd strong drink, unlike anything with which he was acquainted. At table he talked, in a lying strain, of his doings during the day. Finally he expressed himself as curious about the letter his mother had received.

"You and I are to take a holiday, dear," she said, "a whole week in Boston. Have you any recollection of Mrs. Trowbridge to whom I took you when you were a little fellow? She is so eager to have us. I will have to see whether you don't need some new clothes. You and I will shine, won't we, dear? I'll wear all my finery. We've got a week in which to prepare. A holiday with that dear woman! You will like her. We must begin to get ready at once."

Here Mrs. Mulholland broke in.

"Thank goodness!" she said. "For the first time in years, we'll have a chance to show that we're as good as the best!"

"I don't think I want to go," Lenny made the startling announcement. His forehead was damp with perspiration. "I was counting on putting the final touches to my book next week. And I'm so full of the subject that I can't think of being distracted."

"The book can surely wait, dear," said his mother. "Why, we can use part of that week to talk about it! You won't be distracted, I'm sure. You must get away from the lonely existence you have been leading lately. You have been living within yourself. Haven't I seen it? Why, I know you are lonely! So let us have our holiday! You and I!"

Lenny held out a little longer. Then he abruptly gave his consent. There appeared to be little use in doing anything else.

"Are you not glad to go with me?" asked his mother, nonplussed by his lack of interest.

"Why, of course, mamsy!" he replied. "But I didn't like the idea of the fuss it involved. If we hadn't to think about clothes, or be watching our p's and q's—Oh, I like the freedom of our own home! *We* should have done the inviting. A Christmas here is worth two in Boston!" he finished with a little gay air, which was close to tears, nevertheless.

"I promise you, you shall be spoiled by the good time you will have!" said his mother.

"As if anyone could spoil me after the way you have been at it!" he told her.

These words, innocent enough at that moment, were to remain in his mother's memory as long as she lived.

"Anyhow," she remonstrated, with a sudden display of spirit, "it is out of the question for you to talk about working on your book during the holidays, whether at home or

anywhere else! Does that sound like a free rein?" she asked, breaking into a smile.

Lenny tried to drink some water, only to spill part of the glass on the table. He complained because the maid had filled it to the brim.

"You are not yourself to-night, dear," said his mother.

He apologized at once for his display of temper. When his mother dwelt at some length on her plans for their Boston trip, he listened in a dazed manner, and answered in monosyllables.

After the meal, he got away from the table as quickly as good manners would allow. Vertigo seized him on the stairs. Only by a severe effort did he maintain his hold on the bannister, and, after rocking dizzily for a few moments, managed to make his way to his room.

There he laughed hysterically, and fell to wringing his hands. The room seemed to be spinning around him. He had to walk about quickly to suppress the desire to scream. At last he rolled himself into the bedclothes, and, covering his head, writhed about.

The physical torture lasted for a long time, until it completely sapped his strength. Then came a period of quiet, in which he was able to think.

The net result was a letter to Maur. Lenny begged for an appointment, "to discuss business." Then he went to the library and secured one of his father's revolvers, which he inspected with some care. After this he paced the room like a caged animal, smoking a chain of cigarettes. He finally resigned his attempt to see a way out of the difficulty, and left everything to the interview with Maur, too tired to consider what that man's refusal would mean.

Throwing a window open to let out the smoke, he re-

mained staring into the night, the cold air a balm to his throbbing forehead.

"Oh, if I could only have my start over again!" he cried, extending his arms with a gesture of passionate appeal.

Without knowing why, he began to consider how he would act were a new opportunity to be granted him. He broke off to say:

"If I get the money from Maur, I am saved! Then good-bye to card-playing! Good-bye to that crowd! Good-bye to cigarettes! to idleness! to lying! I'll get to work, and make something of myself!"

He questioned whether a letter to Maur was wiser than a personal visit.

"Oh, I can write better than I can talk! And, anyhow, it is more dignified to go about it as if I was not in a hurry," he decided.

Sleep was kind that night. But he awoke at dawn with a loud cry.

During the morning, he watched with straining eyes for the visits of the postman. He was waiting for word from Maur, who must have received his letter at The Elms in the first delivery of mail.

As hour after hour went by, Lenny began to prepare for no answer at all. "I can't escape! I must prepare for the consequences!" he said dully.

But toward evening, the letter arrived. As he opened it, he tried to keep his shaking fingers from tearing the envelope. Maur wrote:

"You will find me at the Lotus Club, in the reading-room, to-morrow afternoon at five. I hope your business is not serious, for I am getting in the habit of leaving my cares behind me when I step out of my office."

The sting of the letter did not altogether lie in the last

words. Maur seemed to have chosen the Lotus Club because Lenny had been eager to join that organization. Only the latter's unsocial life had kept him out of this exclusive club. At one time he had spoken to Justin of seeking admission to it. But Justin, who was a member, had hinted that unless Lenny went out of the way to make himself more popular, he would be blackballed. Therefore, nothing but his desperate need of Maur's help could force him to enter the club-house.

That evening he went to the theatre, although a prey at every moment to the thought that on his return he would find his mother over the depleted jewel-box. He was beginning to blame her sorely for leaving temptation in his way, instead of depositing the jewelry in the vaults of some bank.

After the play, he drank heavily, until he was keyed up to face any scene. The house proved perfectly quiet. Next morning, however, on his descent to breakfast, he carried the revolver in his pocket, fearful of what the day might bring. In his frame of mind, death was the least terrible thing of all.

He was startled to find his mother distressed. The cause of her anxiety affected him greatly. The figure of his father had appeared to her in her sleep, first with his hands covering his face, and then as he had presented himself to Lenny in the third vision of his terrible series of dreams.

"I have never been so frightened!" said Mrs. Craigie. "It seemed like an ill-omen! I cannot attribute it to nervousness, for I have been feeling very well."

Lenny tried to soothe her, although he was himself under the spell of the strange occurrence. He felt as if death had laid its hand upon his heart. Hurriedly changing the conversation, he spoke of spending the whole day in town.

Instead, when he left the house, he wandered out to the winding paths of Wissahickon, where only an occasional automobile or carriage disturbed the silence of the snow-clad park. A two hours' rambling talk with a guard whom he met helped to while away some of the time which must elapse until his meeting with Maur. As he finally went to keep the appointment, the fact that he had taken neither food nor rest since morning did not trouble him. He only knew that he had passed through the longest day of his existence.

Just before he reached the street where the Lotus Club was situated he sought a telephone to call up his home.

"If mother has found out that her jewelry is gone, I won't have to keep the appointment," he said grimly.

She happened to be near the telephone when he called.

"I just wanted to know, mother," he said, "if you had gotten over that scare about your dream. It would be wrong if you worried."

"I have tried to put it out of my mind," was the reply. "You will be home for dinner, won't you?"

"I think so. I'm doing some tall hustling, so that my book may be in shape before we get away."

"Your foolish conscience again, I see!" his mother scolded. Then she told him, "The girl said to-day that your brushes haven't been on your bureau for some time. What are you having done to them?"

"Didn't I tell you they were being fixed up?" he asked, pretending surprise. "I suppose you thought they were stolen!"

"No; or I would have looked to see if anything else had been taken," said his mother.

"Well, you have a fool girl there! She should have told you the first time she saw the brushes were missing,"

Lenny discovered a grievance, to hide his relief at the ease with which he had escaped discovery.

"Don't shift the blame!" came with a laugh over the wire. "It was you who should have told me!"

Lenny wiped the perspiration from his forehead when he hung up the receiver. As he walked up the stairs of the Lotus Club, he murmured:

"Wouldn't it be my confounded luck to find Justin here! I wouldn't know how to explain my interview with Maur."

No one was in the reading-room when he entered. He still had a quarter of an hour until Maur would put in appearance, so he tried to interest himself in some comic journals. Wearied in spirit and body, sick at heart, and with fever burning his frame, he could only crouch in his seat in a dazed manner. Suddenly some one touched him on the arm.

The effect was electrical. His whole body seemed to respond. The tremor which shook him amused Maur, who eyed him critically, with a smile on his lips. The young stockbroker was attired like a dandy. His self-satisfied carriage went with a proud tilt of the head. Before him Lenny felt subdued, and very inferior, and showed his servility in his manner.

"We won't be disturbed, I think," said Maur, condescendingly. "No one is at the club at this time of the day. I can give you twenty minutes."

"Thanks," Lenny got out hurriedly.

He followed Maur up the staircase to the next floor. Coming upon an empty room, they paused, and Maur nodded. When they found seats, Lenny said:

"I will be very brief."

"If you please. I have an engagement for dinner," came with brutal carelessness.

CHAPTER XV

Although Maur's financial success in after years made his early career of small importance to him, he was never to forget this meeting with Lenny. There was to be imprinted upon his memory for all time the figure huddled in the chair opposite him, the blanched trembling lips and the frightened eyes staring ghastly out of a white face.

Lenny began by speaking of the houses which were to be deeded to him as a Christmas gift. Finally he blurted out that he needed two thousand dollars, to make good a number of debts contracted through stock-gambling. He said that he had to have the money at once.

"Will you advance me that sum on a promissory note?" he asked.

Instead of replying directly to the question, Maur asked about the stock which had brought Lenny to grief. The latter stood the cross-examination quite well as a result of the knowledge he had gleaned from his visits to the bucket-shop. He fell through badly, however, when he gave the name of the firm with which he claimed he had dealt.

"Those people went to the wall four months ago," said Maur very deliberately. "I suppose that is the reason their name happened to stick in your memory. I don't know what to believe now, Leonard. Why should I take it for granted that you are to get the houses, after this invention about the stock-gambling? I can't risk two thousand dol-

lars. Suppose we leave the matter until you do come into your property. That's fair enough! And then I'll advance you the money on the quiet. I promise to, my dear fellow! So that's settled. Eh?"

Lenny was livid with rage.

"You're too fast about calling me a liar!" he cried.

"If I was wrong," said Maur composedly, "I beg your pardon. More than that, if you can prove that you actually lost two thousand dollars on stocks, I'll not only lend you the money—I'll give it to you! That's the way I intend to punish myself for mistrusting you. Admit that I can be fair!"

It was a ghastly joke, and it crushed Lenny.

"Bob," he pleaded, "for God's sake, lend me the money! I swear I'll repay it! I expect the houses in two weeks. That is no lie—even though the other was! You couldn't do a greater kindness—it would mean so much to me—lend me the sum I need, Bob!"

"Pshaw, man!" said Maur, making a motion as if about to rise. "Why don't you get it from your mother?"

"Bob, I daren't!" gasped the unfortunate Lenny.

"It would spoil your mother's good opinion of you, eh?"

Then Maur leaned forward and said, "By the way, Conny has an idea that you are a better man than I—that I don't shine by comparison. If you are desirous of showing your friendship for me, suppose you disillusion her a bit. Tell her about this. I may be more inclined to help you then."

"I—I couldn't resort to trading of that sort," said Lenny, drawing back, and immediately aware that he had wounded Maur beyond any hope of recall.

"Trading!" roared the latter. "Somebody would think

that under the circumstances you'd pick your words better! You to preach to me! Bah! You miserable failure!"

Cut to the quick, Lenny cried, "What other word could I use for what you proposed? As for Conny, do you think what I'd say in your favor would help you, after what she knows about you?"

Then he stopped abruptly, his resentment gone. Despair gripped him as he realized how he had been undone by his temper. And his nervous, irresponsible condition made it impossible for him to fall back on his pride in this hour of defeat.

"What Conny knows about me, eh?" snapped Maur. "Well, if I am all that you and she believe me to be, why do you seek my help? You, who are afraid to tell your own mother what you are, fling in my face what you have heard people say about me! You are a man, and I am a rogue, eh! Two thousand dollars! Why should you need it right away, unless you stole it, and have to put it back in a hurry? It is time you were found out for what you are!"

Lenny flung himself at him with a cry of fury, but was thrown back by a sweep of Maur's arm, his weak frame no match for the strength of the old-time academy leader. Then Lenny's hand flashed to his back-pocket.

"What's that!" cried Maur, his eye following the motion of the hand.

Neither of them saw a figure loom up in the doorway of the adjoining room. As Lenny dropped his arm and said, in terrified tones, "Nothing! Nothing!" the figure disappeared.

Maur, believing that Lenny had almost drawn a knife upon him, was not so aggressive now. He was on his guard as he backed toward the door.

"I am sorry you have made it impossible for me to be of

help to you, or to listen to you any longer," he said unsteadily. "But I forgive you for the way you have insulted me. This is where our paths separate!"

As he hurried out, Lenny fell back limply into his seat, his body an inert mass. The retreating footsteps sounded loudly in the stillness of the club-house. Suddenly the crumpled body came to life. It exclaimed in a sobbing voice:

"Yes, I'll end it! I'll end it!"

Lenny struggled to his feet and drew a revolver from his pocket. Before he could use it, a voice sounded through the room, a voice that palsied his arm.

"Stop, man!" came in a tone which was both a command and an entreaty.

It was Justin who leaped toward him.

"Wait!" he pleaded; and by this time his restraining hand was on the pistol. "You are crazy!" he cried. "Death isn't the only way out of trouble!" He had to hold up the collapsing form. "Surely you didn't mean to use that revolver! Why, it is unbelievable! You?"

"Oh, but I did mean to," came wearily. "I am done with life. I am down and out. Please leave me alone, Justin. I know the best way to manage this."

"Nonsense!" said Mahan. "It isn't quite that bad, even though it sounded so. Yes, I heard it all—unintentionally."

A great groan burst from Lenny, and he slid back into the seat, and covered his face with his hands.

"It was providential that I was in the next room," Justin said. "I've been coming here to get away from the noise of the city—even Germantown's. I was dozing when you started in. When I heard who were talking, and what you were talking about, I couldn't for the life of me get

away without knowing how you intended to pull out of your difficulty. Why in the name of all that is sensible you didn't come to me instead of to this fellow, is beyond me! To have expected Maur to deal mercifully with you! Now tell me all about it! The whole thing!"

He sat down near Lenny and placed his hand affectionately on his shoulder. Lenny drew away abruptly.

"I can't tell you anything," he said. But his stubbornness yielded to Justin's silence. "I couldn't, Justin," he suddenly wailed. "You've heard everything. What is there for me to tell?"

"Surely women have not been at the bottom of this!" cried Justin.

Lenny shook his head impatiently.

"Well, never mind the cause just now," said Justin. "We've got other things to think about. First of all, I want to ask what objection you would have to my advancing you the money."

"You?" whispered Lenny, trying to accustom himself to this unexpected way out of his terrible difficulty. "You will give me two thousand dollars? Why, I may not be able to return it for a long time! Suppose I don't get the houses? You might lose all your money!" But he immediately cried, "Yes, yes, I must take it! I must! Please, Justin, don't back down!"

And he sprang out of the chair with a glad cry. The ordeal, however, had been too much for him. He pitched forward into Justin's arms, and lay there in a swoon.

When he opened his eyes, the older man was bathing his temples.

"You'll be all right!" said Justin cheerfully. "It was rather sudden—but not dangerous. Are you yourself again? Because we've got lots to talk about, and you're

due at home in a little while. And we've got to dispose of those two thousand dollars to-morrow, you know."

Lenny tried to smile, in response to the encouraging words.

"I'll get you something to steady you," Justin suggested.

"No!" said Lenny. "Please don't! I mustn't drink anything now."

In half an hour he was able to walk down the stairs and into the street, although his legs were still unsteady. So far he had not spoken a word about the use to which he intended putting the money Justin was to lend him. After they had gone along for some time in silence, Lenny asked:

"At what time can I see you to-morrow?"

"Any hour of the morning. I will have ready cash just as soon as the bank opens," was the reply. "Can you wait until then?"

Fearful of managing any longer without some advice, Lenny made a clean breast of how he had come to need so large a sum of money. He told his story with his face on fire, and with tears of shame in his eyes. Both had come to a stop, but Lenny spoke on with averted head. Twice he broke down, and Justin walked him about, until he could speak again.

"So you see," Lenny said finally, "why I can't leave the house for a minute to-morrow. If I'm there, I can keep mother from fussing around in her room and learning everything."

"Suppose you give me the pawn-tickets," said Justin. "I will redeem the things. Then I will arrange to meet you somewhere near the house with them. Meanwhile, I believe, we can get your mother into Philadelphia for the day. I haven't a plan as yet. But I'll have one before the evening is out."

He had difficulty in not voicing his grief at the sad pass to which Lenny had come.

"How can I thank you?" cried Leonard. "You have been so good to me! Any one else would have rubbed it in!"

"I think you can attend to all the rubbing-in that is necessary," Justin said hastily, to check the words of gratitude. He asked, "Won't you give me your word that when you have escaped from the senseless world in which you have been living lately, that you will tell your mother everything? Not, however, before you have gotten to be your old self again! Not before then! You want to get all the mistrust of yourself out of your system!"

"I *will* tell her, everything!" said Lenny. "Oh, if I only get out of this!"— He broke off tremulously.

"You will! You will!" said Justin cheerily.

"And you are willing to trust me with all that money, after all you heard?" cried Lenny.

"If you will hand over to me your revolver," said Justin, suddenly remembering it.

"Oh, I'll put it back in the library. It's father's, you know. It might be missed," said Lenny.

"Very well. I can depend on you to put it back. I suppose you are carrying the pawn-tickets with you."

Lenny's face was crimson when he handed them over. Justin made no comment about their number. He said, "God be with you, old man," and let their wretched owner go.

"It is unbelievable!" Justin mused as he took his way to Gertrude. "I wonder if I am not dreaming this! It sounds impossible! Yet it is a fact! And of all people, Lenny Craigie!"

Before he reached the Breen home he had ceased to spec-

ulate about the sad affair and the causes which might have led up to it, and was considering what means he could use to get Mrs. Craigie out of the house next morning.

"I have it!" he exclaimed, just at the moment when Gertrude was advancing to greet him.

"What, dear?" she said, surprised by his abstraction.

He smiled at her, and asked to be excused for a few moments while he went into the library. There he did some quick thinking.

"I can pretend a mistake about Beecher's property. It will be perfectly safe to do so," he told himself. "I simply heard twenty thousand when thirty thousand was meant."

He went to the telephone, and called up Mrs. Craigie.

"Will you come to my office early to-morrow morning?" he asked. "I've got a bit of property for you which ought to net you ten thousand in a month. You will be astonished at the stupidity of the people who are willing to part with it. But please come early—will you? Say half-past nine."

Mrs. Craigie thanked him warmly, and promised to be there. His generosity did not surprise her. She saw in the appointment he had made for the next day his way of presenting her with a Christmas gift. Little did she dream that Justin had planned to send her in the company of some one else than himself to inspect the property. He intended that she should discover the mistake about the valuation long after the jewels had been replaced in the box.

At the dinner-table she told Lenny of Justin's kindness. He bubbled over with happiness, for he guessed at once the reason for the appointment. He praised Justin to the skies, and spoke of numerous other proofs of that man's friendship.

"Was there ever a more lovable fellow in the world!" he cried. "I'm never surprised at anything like that from him! What I wonder at is that he doesn't impress everybody the same way. Why, there are people who dislike him! Just as there are people who laugh at his ability!"

"He doesn't really seem to be as energetic as of old," said Mrs. Craigie slowly. "Perhaps he is passing through one of those periods when everything will go wrong. There are such periods in all our lives."

"Do you believe that, mother?" cried Lenny eagerly, his whole face glowing in the certainty of her "Yes."

"I feel sure that the abler the individual, the more moments there are of doubt and weakness," she replied.

Lenny confided to his soul: "You shall know everything —soon!"

He hastened through his meal, and asked to be excused.

"I am going out for a little while, mother," he said. "While I am away, will you look over my manuscript? I'll bring it down. Put in all the corrections you want to. I'll do some work on it after I come back. I won't be more than an hour."

His purpose in putting her over the manuscript of his book was to keep her from going to her rooms. After she began reading the scribbled pages, he hurried to a drugstore, where he telephoned Justin. He could not think of going over to the Breen home.

"Why, yes," Justin said, "I can get away for a few moments." And he appointed a place nearby.

The first question he asked when they met was: "You weren't worried about your mother's intended visit downtown to-morrow morning, were you?"

"Oh, I saw through that at once!" Lenny replied. "But

that changes your plan about redeeming those things, doesn't it?"

"Not necessarily. I had intended to send some one else to inspect the property with your mother. But now that you have suggested it, it would be a good idea to have you meet me before the hour I appointed with her. I will have the money for you, and you can make the rounds with the tickets. That," said Justin, "will give me a chance to go with your mother myself. Here are the pawn tickets. They are more likely to be safe in your pocket than mine."

As Lenny took them, Justin added, "Another reason why it would be better for you to go to the pawnbrokers yourself, is because they know you, and would not ask questions."

Lenny saw the importance of this at once.

"Yes! Yes!" he said. "And now I'll not trouble you any more to-night. I really wanted to see you again—for it was good to be able to go to some one who knew.—But you understand!"

Justin said, "Yes." And he added mentally, "Poor fellow!"

When they were separating, he exclaimed:

"Good luck to you, Lenny! We will make much of the future, won't we?"

"How can I thank you?" was all Lenny could reply.

It was Justin's refusal to preach which had touched him most deeply. A more effective course could not have been chosen to drive home to him the gravity of what he had done. He left Justin with a greater dignity of soul than he had known for months.

He found his mother wrinkling her forehead over the manuscript.

"It is still so disjointed!" she said. "You ought to have

written some of these heroic episodes at a single sitting after you gathered your facts, dear. But let us get at this in detail."

So they settled themselves for a long evening of discussion and correction. Finally the night was far enough advanced to make it safe for Lenny to resign his task of keeping his mother from her room. As he went up the stairs, he might have challenged Trevor to equal the part he had played that evening.

But his thoughts were far from boastful. When he retired, he lay perfectly still for a long time, listening for any sound from his mother's room which might announce the discovery of the theft. When midnight came, and silence reigned through the house, he breathed a long quivering sigh of relief, that swept up from his whole body.

"At last there is some chance of my pulling through!" he whispered.

Sleep was not easy. He lay motionless, and tried to plan for the future.

"All this experience will not be thrown away on me!" he said. "And now I will go back to my law, and corporation law at that—after I regain some of my strength."

Despite this, he dared not tell himself that he was a physical wreck, and that his mind would have considerable difficulty in resuming hard study. Instead, he wondered where he could pick up a law library cheaply, and was calculating how soon he would be in a position to enter into partnership with Justin. His only concession to his broken state of health was the promise, "I won't smoke as much from now on. I mustn't!"

He never knew when sleep intervened. It proved full of fantastic horrors, which tossed him about as a leaf is blown

about in a gale. Once he awoke, and smoked for an hour. When he awoke again, day was breaking.

He dozed until it was time to dress. Then he went over his pawn-tickets, in order to lay out a route which would take him to all the pawnshops in the least amount of time.

Again he listened for a sound of alarm from his mother's room. Suddenly he was startled by the fact that rain was coming down, mingled with sleet, and that the ground was ice-covered. He grew terrified. Would not the state of the weather prevent his mother's visit to Justin's office? Was she not likely to postpone the inspection of the property, and to remain at home?

He hurried below in time to get the mail from the postman, who had rung. His hope for a letter from Justin was not realized.

"He might have expected bad weather!" Lenny said bitterly. "If he would only telephone that any delay would cost her the property!"

He trembled when he heard his mother's step on the stairs. She tried to smile a greeting, but finally had to confess:

"I have a bad headache. It will force me to stay indoors after all. I don't believe I should venture out in weather like this, should I?"

"Not if—if you think it will be all right to break the appointment—" Lenny stammered.

"There isn't really any need of my going," said his mother. "I'll just telephone Mr. Mahan to buy."

"He wanted so much to show it to you!" said Lenny, in a hollow voice.

"I shall get the chance before we leave for Boston. After breakfast I'll make an effort to get rid of my headache by going over the things we will need next week. I

want you to look over your clothes, dear, and not to leave it to the last moment."

Lenny was too stunned to speak. There seemed to be some way of postponing the moment when she would stumble upon her loss. But his cigarette-fumed mind failed him utterly at this juncture.

As he nibbled at his breakfast, he kept debating whether to flee the house or to remain. Although he saw the folly of staying when every moment brought the fatal discovery nearer, there was a meaningless fascination in wanting to watch for what would happen when his mother opened her jewelry box. This fascination was not unlike that exerted by the gaze of a snake on a bird, which moves to its doom, wildly piping, but helpless.

There was a similarity between this and the paralysis of Lenny's will power. He could do nothing but keep moving about within reach of his mother's voice. When she ascended the stairs, he mechanically followed her. Then he strayed off to his own room, where he crouched on the edge of the bed, listening to the murmur of voices coming from his mother's apartments, where she and Mrs. Mulholland had set to work looking over articles of wear for the Boston trip.

Suddenly there was a hush, followed by a cry of alarm. The exclamation snapped the invisible bonds which had held Lenny during the last hours. He was on his feet at once, prepared for the words which would follow.

"Lenny! Quick!" came clamoring through the house. "Somebody has been at your mother's things!"

His hands went out with a sob. He was pleading for life.

Again Mrs. Mulholland's voice sounded loudly:

"Come quick, Lenny! Where are you?"

He made no answer. Instead he took the revolver from the bureau, and slipped it into his pocket. Then he scribbled three words on a card. They said:

"Forgive me, mother."

Placing this on the bureau, he put the pawn-tickets on top of it.

The next moment he had hurried down the rear stairway. No one happened to be in the kitchen when he fled through it. When he reached the path leading from the rear of the house around to the street, he preferred, on second thought, to go straight across the open space to the hedge at the far corner.

Over this hedge he fell rather than climbed. Then he ran on through the chilling drizzle, his mouth wide open, and his eyes fixed glassily. He moaned as he struggled for breath.

When he had gone some distance, he looked back to see if the house was still within sight. A sudden slope in the ground entirely obscured it. Gasping a sigh of relief, he put one arm about the trunk of a tree to steady himself. With his free hand he drew the revolver from his pocket.

"Mother!" he wailed. "Mother!"

It was a boy's cry rather than a man's, and the wild, staring eyes were those of a boy. He had to use two fingers to pull the trigger.

CHAPTER XVI

At nine o'clock that morning, Justin telephoned to Mrs. Craigie. Mrs. Mulholland was the one who answered the call, and in her excitement she did not note how unnerved the man at the other end of the wire was. She said:

"I don't believe Mrs. Craigie can talk to you, Mr. Mahan. She is very much disturbed. Will you call her up later?"

"Why, what has happened?" Justin found voice to ask.

"N—nothing. Were you to see Leonard this morning?"

"Lenny? Why? Is there anything the matter with him?"

"No. But if he should come to your office, will you tell him that his mother wants him at home as soon as he can get here?"

"Certainly. In fact, I do expect him. Can I be of service to you?"

"No, only to send him home. His mother is anxious to see him."

"Will you get Mrs. Craigie to call me up as soon as she is able to?" said Justin.

Mrs. Mulholland hurriedly promised. Then she hung up the receiver. Before Justin could get another opportunity to telephone Mrs. Craigie, he was approached by a member of the firm, and asked to go to court. The matter was so urgent that Justin could not delay.

When he returned three hours later, he was informed that there had been several telephone calls for him—"By a lady," said the boy, "but she gave no name."

Justin immediately took up the receiver, only to relinquish it and to sit helplessly before the telephone.

He did not dare to make a move to find out the state of affairs at Mrs. Craigie's home. While he had been transacting his business in court, he had several times imagined that Lenny was waiting for him at the office. The fact that he had not been there, coupled with the several telephone calls, which must have come from Mrs. Craigie, heightened Justin's fears.

As he sought to see his way clear through the incidents of the morning, he stumbled upon an explanation. "Mrs. Craigie did not wish to be explicit, and so sent Mrs. Mulholland to the telephone, because she guessed that Lenny had been responsible for the abstraction of the jewels," he reasoned.

He got up and paced the room nervously.

"Poor woman! Poor Lenny!" he said. "His mother must believe that he has run away to hide himself. As long as she believes that nothing more serious has happened, she will not turn to me for aid."

He went to the telephone boy and asked, "Did that lady inquire if Mr. Craigie was here."

"Yes, sir," came in reply.

"Why didn't you tell me so?" Justin demanded.

The answer, "You didn't ask me, sir," although exasperating at first, could not, on second thought, evoke much blame from Justin.

He reflected, "The boy is right. I should have asked—confound my stupidity! Mrs. Craigie telephoned only because she must have wanted to know whether he was here.

It would not have been like her to have told me anything until she saw him."

He asked himself whether he ought not to remain in the office so as to give Lenny every chance of finding him and of straightening matters out in case there had really been no discovery of the loss of the jewelry.

"No, Mrs. Craigie must know all!" he said with a sad shake of his head. "What else can the telephoning and Lenny's disappearance mean? He has been found out!"

As he strode about, his forehead wrinkled with anxiety, he kept asking himself:

"At a critical moment like this, is it not my place to be in Germantown?"

Going to the telephone, he called up the police department. He gave his name, and inquired what the last police news from Germantown was. "Two fires," came in reply.

But Justin was not relieved. "Something more serious than the loss of her jewelry may confront Mrs. Craigie!" he said, pale with anxiety, and he hastily got on his overcoat.

He told the boy at the telephone to inform all who might inquire for him that he was at Miss Breen's home in Germantown. Hurrying to the station, he caught a local train just as it was about to pull out. When he alighted at his stopping place, a friend's automobile gave him a "lift" to Gertrude's door. The rain on the glass of the vehicle's hood kept him from getting a glimpse of Mrs. Craigie's house as they flew by.

Gertrude proved to be out. When Justin lifted his eyebrows at the risk she was running in braving such weather, her maid said, to reassure him:

"Mrs. Crandall's carriage will bring her home. Miss

Breen spoke of being back at two. She ought to be here directly, sir."

Justin went to the library and flung himself into a chair before the fireplace. The grayness outside which thickened the shadows all over the room was somewhat set off by the blaze in the fireplace.

But this did not cheer Justin, who puffed his cigarette nervously, while his thoughts dwelt in gloomy fashion on Lenny's inexplicable mania for gambling.

Before long his uneasiness about Lenny gave way to depressing thoughts about himself. He asked:

"What successes have I brought Gertrude? How have I proved myself worthy of her love? Was I the right sort of man for this wonderful girl, after all?"

And he admitted sorrowfully, "I am the one mistake she has made—she who was able to accomplish so much, who was able to mould Conny into a woman, though herself only a girl, and who could have led a real man to great heights!"

He saw in that moment what a failure he promised to be in politics. This threatened to prove equally true of his law work. Instead of the brilliancy everyone had expected of him, he was hardly holding his own.

"I am only second-rate, mediocre, useless!" he declared.

Facing the situation fully, he was frank enough to confess that he had laid too great stress on how he had been passed by in law and politics, and not enough on the way in which he had shirked responsibility.

"I could have overcome all obstacles if I had fought hard enough," he exclaimed. "My love for Gertrude should have helped me to do so. The important thing was that I owed it to her to bring her the greatest possible happiness. It was not enough to offer her explanations for failure!"

Then he voiced in a whisper a thought which had dimly presented itself to him before:

"Ought I not to give Gertrude her freedom?"

"That would really be a big thing!" he said. "True, I would be striking a blow at my own happiness; but what other chance have I of showing her that I'm not a puny self-seeker? She will not want to consider it. She will say that it is an insult to her love for me and my love for her. But I will talk plainly. I will prove to her how wise it would be for her to let me go. It is the only thing in my power that I have to offer her."

He pondered this until his soul quivered with pain.

"Oh, what a coward I am!" he snarled. "If I weren't, I would not be thinking about my feelings! Her welfare comes first. It is paramount. How dare I consider my convenience? This namby-pamby way of living is not decent! And she shall not share it!"

Gertrude entered at this moment. At once he found his good resolutions melting away like wax in a flame. Every thought of giving up the beautiful girl vanished, as her little cry of surprise and happiness at finding him there sent the blood leaping through his veins.

"Tell me," she said hastily, not understanding why he was there at that hour, "is everything all right, dear?"

"As always," he said with the suggestion of a shrug. "So I thought I would come to Germantown for the rest of the day."

"You did not have Mrs. Craigie go into town in a day like this?" she said, taking his reluctant hand.

"No, not in this beastly weather. It would be almost night in here if it wasn't for your fireplace."

Inwardly he was saying, "How will I ever find courage

to speak about what concerns us? Am I never to face her in the right way on a matter so vital to her?"

Gertrude had remarked, "Yes, it is very dark, and growing darker. I shall have the lamp lighted. But I must get my hat off! It was so good to find you here, I forgot everything else!"

He let her go without a word. When the maid came in to light the lamp, he watched the operation dully until, to shake off his mental numbness, he leaped to his feet and began pacing the room.

Gertrude slipped in again, unseen by him, and uneasily watched his preoccupation. He sighed, and went to the window, out of which he stared, his head bowed, and his shoulders stooped in dejection. As Gertrude, greatly moved by the sadness which revealed itself in every line of his body, was about to speak, he started and cried:

"Conny is running here full tilt like a mad person! She is frightened about something. She hasn't even put her umbrella up. Where has she been? Good heavens, what is the matter with the girl?"

He threw up the long window and whistled shrilly. Conny came running in with a wild cry, leaped past him, and flung herself into the arms of Gertrude, sobbing hysterically as she clung to her, the sobs broken by shrieks.

"Why, what's the matter?" cried Justin, dashing the window into place and coming hurriedly over.

"Oh! oh! oh!" Conny wailed in tones of despair.

"Come, now," Justin insisted. "You are frightening Gertrude. Speak out. Do you hear? Don't keep your aunt in this terrible suspense."

It was almost a command. Justin was nervous enough to seize her arm forcibly as he spoke.

"Oh, he's dead, he's dead!" Conny sobbed out wildly.

Justin reeled. He knew at once what she had to impart. His head felt as if it had been filled with fire.

"Who is dead?" Gertrude demanded in terror, holding Conny off to force an answer.

"Oh, oh, he has killed himself! He is dead!" sobbed the grief-stricken girl.

"Who?" thundered Justin, to bring the suspense to an end.

"Lenny! Lenny! My Lenny is dead!" And as if an invisible hand had struck her down, Conny went to the floor in a heap, and lay moaning there.

"Lenny Craigie!" cried Gertrude, steadying herself only by an effort.

Justin stood immovable, his heart's pulsations almost at a fading point.

"Yes," he answered for the speechless girl lying on the floor, "it must be Lenny."

Gertrude by a supreme effort kept from fainting. Then she said: "I must go over there. She will need me. Oh, how was it possible? He kill himself—he a boy—a mere boy!"

"Yes, yes!" cried Conny, and shrieked: "He did it with a pistol! Why?—why? Oh, my Lenny!"

"We must go over there at once, Gertrude," Justin said hoarsely. "I'll get the maid to bring you some extra wraps——"

He put out his arm just in time to save her from falling. The enormity of the horror had come to her in full at that moment, as she mentally saw the bereaved mother over the body of her dead son.

"I will be all right in a minute!" she gasped, clinging to him. "How terrible! Justin, think what it means for his mother. It will kill her!" Then she knelt down be-

side Conny, who was lying at full length on the floor weeping wildly, and the two sobbed in each other's arms.

"I'll call down Trevor," said Justin. "He had better be with you while I go over to Mrs. Craigie's."

"No! No! Let me go to her!" cried Gertrude.

"You must not," said Justin. "You couldn't bear it. Not now. But I ought to be there. And the sooner the better."

Conny suddenly released herself from Gertrude's arms, and brushing the wet hair from her eyes, exclaimed vehemently:

"No, you won't, Justin Mahan! You shan't go there!"

The antagonism in her voice dumbfounded him. He stared at the rebellious figure, and asked sharply:

"What do you mean? What are you talking about? Why do you speak that way?"

"Not you!" she cried, her eyes flashing as she stood up. "Oh, no! Because it was you who brought Lenny to this! Yes, you!"

Before either of her astounded auditors could find voice, and before Justin had time to imagine how any fault of his during the last twenty-four hours could have brought about the tragedy, Conny plunged into a hysterical denunciation.

"It was his cigarette-smoking that led him to this. The cigarettes drove him crazy. He must have done something of which he was ashamed. Didn't we all hear about his going to the bad? I didn't believe it. But now I know there must have been some truth in it. And all because he wanted to imitate you—that's how he got the cigarette habit!"

Justin stepped back, astounded. But Conny did not pause.

"A doctor told him long ago that he was becoming a wreck because of cigarettes. And Lenny knew that the habit was hurting him—that it spoiled his studying, his ambitions, his friendships—everything! Oh, I can't tell you how I got to know it, but I did."

"But why do you drag me into this?" stormed Justin.

"Because he thought at first the smoking couldn't hurt him because it didn't hurt you. That's not all, either. He worshiped you. He wanted to do everything you did. And because you smoked he started it early. You saw him do it, yet you never said a word. He believed all the time that if it was all right for you, it was all right for him. And he got sicker and sicker. Then he grew to be idle and downhearted. He couldn't study, he couldn't do any work. Didn't Bob Maur tell me that cigarettes kept Lenny from making the baseball or football teams? And you encouraged him to become a cigarette-fiend. And now he has killed himself! My Lenny is dead—dead!"

She had stumbled through this brokenly, but it was none the less impressive. The words were like hammer-blows. As she once more sank to the floor and rocked back and forth with heartrending sobs, Justin, deathly pale, did not dare to look at her or at Gertrude. He heard the latter say in horrified tones:

"Constance, you cannot know what you are saying! Why, this is a terrible accusation! How dared you talk like that?"

Justin shook himself together out of the stupor into which Conny's words had thrown him. Before he could speak, however, she had taken up her charges again.

"It is a terrible accusation, but it is true!" she insisted. "Didn't a big physician show him that cigarettes were responsible for all his troubles? And Lenny, too, was sure

his smoking hurt him dreadfully. But he couldn't stop. His cigarettes kept him from putting up any sort of a fight. They robbed him of all his strength. All because he wanted to copy Justin! He was always pointing to him when I scolded about the lot of smoking he did. He found out too late. Then he must have gotten into terrible company. And he is dead, dead!"

"You do not mean that they are saying these things over at his home?" Justin hoarsely demanded.

Conny shook her head.

"Only I knew," she said. "His mother never dreamed what was the matter with him. I hope she never will. My poor Lenny! Oh, I can't bear it, I can't! And he never came to me. He got to be ashamed. Why didn't I help him even if he didn't want to let me! He was too proud, my Lenny! Oh, I shall go crazy!"

She staggered to her feet once more, to go to the one person to whom she now instinctively turned in her despair—her "uncle." But Justin, aroused, blocked the way.

"Listen," he said. "You don't appear to realize the gravity of your words. You have made a terrible charge, which is not founded on fact. I am in a position to know that Lenny did make a great mistake, but that he was led into temptation as any boy might have been. To say that I was at the bottom of it—well, I can only forgive your strange words when I see how overwrought you are. But you must not tax my patience by repeating these sweeping charges," he warned.

"Can't you see it was the smoking?" persisted Conny. "From the time he began, everything went wrong. He got poor in his work. He got too nervous for athletics. He was always moody and sick. All his ambition vanished. And he knew it himself. That doctor wasn't guessing.

Lenny wouldn't have believed him if there hadn't been some cause for it. And all of it started because he worshiped you, and he imitated you. I can't forget how he always excused his smoking by pointing to you."

Justin sought for words, but could only say:

"Although he was going down-hill, he never hinted to me that I was the cause of it—that I was to be blamed."

"Oh, it isn't he who blames you," said Conny bitterly, through her tears. "It is I who blame you. Didn't I see you giving him cigarettes? So often! And when he was fighting them, too! But he couldn't refuse you. Not you! Why, you're a cigarette-fiend yourself!" came in strident tones. "Smell the smoke in this room! Isn't it enough to make one sick? Think of him breathing smoke like that, day in and day out, year after year! No wonder he never amounted to much! My poor Lenny!"

Then as she went on, her eyes became dry and angry. She was no longer the light-hearted girl who had brought laughter to the house. She was vengeance itself. Her intense earnestness carried conviction and crushed out argument.

"He dreamt of becoming your partner. He wanted to be useful, and to grow into a big man. When he had strength he could work—even when he was sick, too. How he did fight at times! It is a torture to remember how lonely he must have been when he did. If he had only believed in himself from the start, and not in you! But to him you were the perfect man. How blind he was! And when he believed in people, he believed with his whole soul. And he did some great wrong, because the fight had died out of him. And when he saw how terrible the wrong was, instead of remembering what he owed his mother and me and all of us, he killed himself. He had become a coward.

My brave Lenny a coward! Who helped to kill him, Justin? It was the man who had encouraged him to become a cigarette-fiend!"

Only the countless hours with Trevor had enabled Conny to acquire the richness of vocabulary and the dramatic power which she threw into her denunciation, and which served her in that strange hour. She had not, however, striven for effect. The whole was put powerfully because she had been armed by the soul-racking events at Mrs. Craigie's death-filled home, and by her own grief and horror.

The point was now reached when Justin found himself unable to make light of the grave charges. Deep within him a voice declared: "They are true. Do you not see that cigarettes have crushed out your own energies and left you a useless individual? What else has been the cause of your failure?"

He dared not look in Gertrude's direction. When with a moan she stole out of the room, he felt the ground slipping from under his feet. In that moment he understood as never before why one might be driven to end one's life. Suddenly he saw again, very distinctly, Lenny's almost successful attempt at suicide in the Lotus Club.

Justin's despair at the pass to which he had himself come was forgotten when Conny's sobbing fell upon his ear in the profound silence about them. She had groped her way to a chair, too weak to leave the room. Infinite pity for her welled through him as he suddenly caught at something he had not seen before. He asked in a whisper:

"Conny, did you love him?"

There came in a tired voice: "I don't know." Immediately after he heard, with a feeling of awe: "I suppose I did."

Conny burst into sobs again, wild sobs which shook her body and which were like knife-thrusts to Justin, who writhed in pain. He covered his face with his clenched hands.

The next moment he was at Conny's side. Bending over her, he said:

"It is too late to atone for anything—it would be so useless! I can't do more than to beg your forgiveness. I do feel now that I led him on by example. Of course, it won't be easy for you to forgive me. But think how heavy God's punishment will be as time goes on! I will pay dearly for this during every living, breathing moment. God help me! I think I have most need of it now."

"Oh, Justin, Justin, he is dead!" came wailingly in answer.

"I would gladly change places with him if I could!" said Justin. "Heaven forgive me for the harm I have inadvertently done you and his mother!"

Conny slipped away. He heard as in a dream the sound of her feet on the stairs. Walking to the table, he mechanically opened his cigarette case and, taking out a cigarette, he as mechanically lighted it. The next instant he threw it and the cigarette case, with a tremor of intense revulsion, into the fireplace, where a last log was smouldering.

The silence about him was oppressive. He tried to think, but he only knew that terrible days were before him, and that he had gone through a disastrous defeat which might leave him nothing of a future. In his overwhelming loneliness, he cried:

"Gertrude! Gertrude!"

There was no answer. As his arm fell limply to his side, it struck the ash tray standing nearby, and sent its contents over his clothes. The incident passed unobserved.

A cloud had settled over his thoughts, and he grew more and more unable to make his way through the torturing horrors which beset him.

Then he saw in its full aspect how a habit had made his life an utter failure. He did not remember whether Conny had pointed this out when she charged him with responsibility for Lenny's death. There was no doubt, however, that Gertrude had seen it in its full significance.

Justin could not ignore the fact. He was soon asking himself:

"Why should I not be honest enough to admit that Lenny's excessive smoking was, in the main, responsible for his wrong-doing, and for his death?"

He remembered his own visits to the physician.

"Am I not destroying my life, even as I indirectly encouraged Lenny to destroy his?" he reflected.

The perspiration beaded itself on his forehead.

"To whom could I first make atonement for the tragedy of to-day?" he asked, pacing the room like a madman. "To the frantic mother who is to take her only son to a suicide's grave? To Conny, who, in this dreadful hour, has found that she loved the dead boy? To Gertrude, who has hidden until this moment the sorrow my failure has brought her?"

He cried aloud, "Lenny dead is much more fortunate than I living!"

"Do not say that!" came in frightened tones from the door. As he halted with a start, Gertrude came to him and laid her hands on his shoulders.

Her unexpected return unnerved him, and sent him weakly into a chair. Gertrude slipped down by his side.

"You must not forget that all you do has to take two into account!" she said. "Just as my life has become a planning for two! And when your terrible hurt came with

Conny's words, I, too, was wounded. But as I thought it all over, I believed more and more that you could surmount all obstacles, that you could conquer the past. I believed this because of my faith in you. My whole being is tied up with yours. All you will do will be either life or death to me. Will you remember this? It is all I ask now, dear."

"But you are ignoring my part in Lenny's death!" he cried. "It *was* the smoking! I am sure of it now! When is my punishment to begin?"

"No one could be more cruel to you than you are yourself," said Gertrude gently. "Surely, you will not ask me to add to the punishment!"

Justin threw back his head.

"I swear to you," he said with fierce determination, "that I will never again touch tobacco! I will get for you and for myself all the things that you and I have set our hearts on! Instead of a mere shell of a man, I will bring you strength, and ambition, and honor, and achievement! I have lived like a fool, but I shall live like a man!"

He took her head in his hands, and kissed her brow with a profound earnestness which sealed his promise.

Both became conscious of the odor of newly-lighted cigarettes in the room. Justin looked at the fireplace. The cigarette case he had flung into it had been slowly heated by the embers until its contents had begun to burn. Gertrude followed the direction of Justin's eyes, and both watched the cigarettes in the opened silver case become consumed until nothing was left of them except a little heap of ashes.

Gertrude flung up her arms eagerly, and cried:

"Kiss me, dearest!"

As his arms released her, he said:

"Now you must go over to his mother. I cannot!"

CHAPTER XVII

Colonel Henderson had embarked for Europe just a day prior to the calamity at the home of the woman he had courted so long and so hopelessly. At Plymouth he secured a copy of the London "Times," glad to be brought in touch with home again, even if the American news occupied but a small portion of the paper. As the steamer continued its course to Liverpool, the Colonel settled himself comfortably for an hour's reading.

Before he had passed the second page, he was brought to his feet by an astounding item.

"Great heavens!" he gasped. "It isn't possible!"

The paper spoke of the suicide of "a son of Captain Craigie, himself deceased, who so heroically saved the ship of which he was in command, the Niagara, some fifteen years ago." The suicide could not be attributed to any known cause.

For a full minute the Colonel stared dumbly at the printed words before him, unable to reread the single paragraph. Gathering himself together, he went over to a passenger who was lounging near the rail, and said:

"My dear Mr. Hallock, may I ask you to do me a favor? Will you kindly read these few lines for me? I haven't my glasses handy, and it concerns a friend. I believe it is bad news."

The words he had read were repeated to him. Bowing his thanks, the Colonel hastily descended to his cabin.

As a result of the facts that had come to him so unexpectedly, he took the next steamer home after landing at Liverpool. Never was an ocean voyage so long or so tedious, despite the new ocean record the boat created. When he appeared in Germantown within two weeks after having left it, his friends were not surprised.

Those who were not well acquainted with Mrs. Craigie said: "She must have cabled him." Her friends saw the matter in another light. "He must have gotten the news, and is making a last effort to win her," they argued. "It's his 'now or never'!"

So the Colonel thought, for his first visit was to the bereaved mother. She received him in a forlorn way, which seemed to him to fit in with his purpose. He was sincere, however, when he said:

"I know what this has meant to you. It has been a sad blow to me, too. I loved the boy."

He spent but little time on this visit, or on the next. The third time he spoke his mind.

"Let me share your grief in the way in which I wish to share it," he pleaded. "You and I will treasure his memory together. Surely you will not send me away! I want to be of help to you, yet something more than a friend!"

She sobbed silently for a while. When she was somewhat composed, she told him:

"What you ask is impossible. I cannot enter upon any new life now. The memory of the two I have loved must fill my whole existence. Do not be harsh in your judgment of me, my friend. I no longer live in the present. I have even prayed that I may die quickly. That is wrong,

I know—especially since I feel the nearness of my two loved ones. You see how impossible your request is!"

"How can you make your existence a living tomb!" he protested.

"Don't you see that it is no tomb—that the two live for me!" cried Mrs. Craigie. "That is what makes life bearable. Do not be impatient with me, my friend. You won't be if you will try to understand."

The gentleness with which she spoke left him helpless, although he was resentful of her resignation. He decided to be as patient as in the past. Victory might finally be his reward if he could in time make himself indispensable to her.

As he was about to go, she suddenly put her hand on her heart in a frightened manner.

"I—I must ask a favor of you," she said.

The Colonel bowed with his customary courtliness.

"Do not come to see me," she asked. "I want you to count me among the dead. I must, really, insist upon your not coming!" There was passionate command in her voice when she cried, "Somehow, your presence here seems treason to them both!"

The words rang the death-knell of his hopes. He helped the trembling woman gently into the seat from which she had risen, and left the house. There was never to be erased from his memory the intensity with which she had spoken her words of dismissal, nor the strange, sweet figure she presented as she stood up, her slim body in black, her eyes fixed upon another world.

After the passage of a few days, she was able to send Mrs. Mulholland upon an errand, for which she could hardly find words. Mrs. Mulholland redeemed the jewelry, and Lenny's things. When the gold, and gems, and other

valuables were once more in Mrs. Craigie's possession, she kept only those which the Captain had given her, and Lenny's belongings. The rest was sold, and the proceeds distributed to charity.

"What better use could I make of them?" she had asked herself. "They brought him destruction. Now let them bring some poor souls a little happiness."

She remained in total ignorance of both Maur's and Justin's knowledge of the cause of the tragedy. Maur was curious enough about Lenny's wrong-doing to attempt to find out if the persons from whom he had borrowed money would have any newspaper comment to make about the suicide. It seemed reasonable to him that reporters should find someone who would talk, particularly because of the stir the suicide had created. He was never to know that the only large creditor was Mrs. Craigie herself.

But to his surprise and disappointment the papers did not devote considerable space to Lenny's death. The curtailing of newspaper notices was due to Justin. Enlisting the services of two prominent Philadelphians, he had visited newspaper managers, with the result that the bereavement of Mrs. Craigie was neither given large headlines nor put on front pages after the first issue of the papers.

Only once during the week of the tragedy did Justin meet Maur, and he snubbed the stockbroker with a directness which sent the color rioting to the latter's face. After that Justin sought to put him out of his mind. He was too conscious of his own blame in the matter to find fault with any one else.

Little time was left him to ponder what had occurred. At a stroke he had entered into a law partnership with an able man, and had once more thrown himself actively into politics. At first all his work entailed the greatest

hardship, for a single reason—because of the constant, feverish longing for cigarettes.

There were times when the need of them almost drove him frantic. It required every grain of will-power he possessed to pass a tobacco store without entering; and, oddly, this desire produced an effect akin to nausea. During this period he appeared to be physically losing ground rather than gaining it. But although he worried, he would insist angrily:

"I won't give in, even if it kills me!"

He was observant of himself sufficiently to soon note little changes in his favor. His voice grew steadier, and his throat did not trouble him as much as in the past. Before long other favorable changes began to manifest themselves. His fatigue at night was not as exhausting as formerly, nor did it assume the form of extreme nervousness. He found less difficulty in looking people straight in the eye. The old-time firmness of his jaw was also in evidence.

Then other signs of the return of his former confident self began to show themselves. He ceased to quake before getting up in court. He did not easily lose his temper with opposing attorneys, but "held up his end" composedly. The springiness of his step, which took the place of the lolling walk he had developed in the last half dozen years, once more evinced the athlete. He was able to concentrate on his work for long periods of time, instead of finding two hours of application his limit of endurance.

Food did not have to be peculiarly prepared to awaken his appetite. Nor was he fearful of exposure to bad weather. A cold day lent zest to a walk instead of merely furnishing an excuse for not getting out. And one day he stumbled upon the fact that he was putting on weight.

"By George!" he said with a happy laugh, "this is ser-

ious! It won't be so hard to make people believe I am a success!"

Although he did not tell Gertrude of the new life flowing through his veins, nor of the wonders it had wrought, he was almost driven to boasting of it after an experience which showed that his cigarette habit had at last been conquered.

He took refuge, by accident, in the door of a tobacco store during a severe rain storm. The odor of the place, instead of attracting, repelled him. Exclaiming, "Thank God!" he hurried away with an exultant heart.

All that day he walked about as if on wings.

Gertrude had no need to be told that the tide was setting in his direction. She saw before her a smiling, optimistic man, steady of gaze and decisive of speech, who radiated confidence, who daily came to her with additional proofs of his success in law, and whose circle of friends once more included men of strong personality. If he indulged in criticism of individuals now, it was for good reasons, and not because he was out of humor.

In the peace which thus came to Gertrude she arrived at the conclusion that there was a great gift which it was in her power to bestow, and which ought not to be held back any longer. She sent a servant to Trevor one day with the request for an interview. She asked that this take place in his rooms.

The old actor was thrown into a flurry.

"Gertrude Breen to see me here!" he wondered. He was greatly disturbed. "It must be about Conny," he said. "She must want Conny to do something—and believes I have more influence with her. My poor Conny. It was indeed time that we discussed her future!"

When Gertrude came up he was waiting at the head of

the stairs. Conducting her to what he called his "library," he moved the most comfortable seat toward her, but did not himself sit down.

"No! No! You must not stand!" she said hastily, greatly embarrassed by his display of humility. "Please take that seat. I expect to stay for some time—if you will let me."

After he had seated himself, she began,

"I have come to talk over a serious matter, one which has been engaging my thoughts ever since the death of Leonard Craigie."

For the first time since he had known her, she became confused and was at a loss for words.

"We have passed through a trying period," he sought to help her, wondering whether her evident distress arose from the memory of Lenny's act, or because of what she wished to say.

"Well,"—Gertrude drew a long breath as she spoke—"I want you to tell Conny that you are her father."

Trevor stood up with staring eyes, his mien that of one who had been very much frightened, and he became deathly pale. Gertrude, seeing the startling effect her words had produced, also rose from her seat, and the two remained standing during the entire colloquy.

"Aside from the fact that you have been like a father to her anyhow during your entire stay here," said Gertrude, "my reason for having Constance know the truth arises from the new condition we are facing. It is certain that Conny concealed, almost from herself, the love she bore for Leonard Craigie. His death has brought it to light—as you have seen."

"Yes, yes, I have seen it," said Trevor, turning away to

hide the tears which stole down his cheeks. "I guessed it long before that, however."

"You saw more of her than the rest of us," said Gertrude.

"And because I knew, his death was a two-fold blow," Trevor went on, shaken by his grief. "She has shown remarkable strength in the face of it—as much as we could expect from a nature of her sensitiveness!"

"Yes, but she is grieving, and going over to Mrs. Craigie's where she grieves the more, for hours at a time!" said Gertrude. "If we told her this important news, it would mean much to her just now. And it were time that you spoke. You have faithfully kept your word—almost too faithfully! I had hoped that at some moment you would no longer be able to hide your relationship from her."

Trevor stood bowed in thought for a while. Then he lifted his head to say:

"If it were not that we were facing a serious situation, I might refuse to tell her who I am. Oh, you forget what harm I have done you and yours! You forget!"

"We must no longer deal with the past," said Gertrude gently. "Let us give all our thought to the present and the future. Let us do what we can with the living moment rather than with the dead. Do you not agree with me that your telling her would distract her mind sufficiently to ease her grief?"

"I feel it would," said Trevor. "But I am afraid of misunderstandings. Unless I revealed to her the extent of my brutality to her mother, she might not be able to look at things in the right light. She might blame both you and myself for the silence we have kept. You see," he said apologetically, "in her great regard for me, she would make

the childish error of thinking that you had been unkind—when you have really taken the most proper course in the world! Oh, you know I cannot thank you enough for what you have done for me——"

She checked him with a hasty "Please!" Then she told him:

"I am not going to let you speak to her about your—your difficulties with her mother. What if Conny does not understand why we have kept silent so long? It would be preferable to your going through the torture of raking up the past! Oh, I cannot allow you to be so brutal to yourself! No! No! Let her only guess what has been! Bring her your love, for she loves you with all the intensity of a daughter!"

"I would rather tell her," Trevor said with sudden stubbornness. "It is my last opportunity to punish myself, and I must seize it! What! Shall that terrible offense against the love of Marie be buried out of sight so quickly? You forget my brutality—my criminal brutality! But if you are kind enough to overlook it, I am not!"

"Oh, but this is dreadful!" protested Gertrude. "It is almost madness! It will only sadden Conny, and undo our wish to help her!"

"Perhaps I shall not make the blow too sudden for her," Trevor compromised somewhat. "But she shall know, nevertheless—all the facts! Why should she remain in ignorance of them? Would I not be living a lie to resort to concealment? I am certain that I owe it to Marie to begin my new relationship with Conny by telling her the truth!"

"I do not know that Marie would be glad about what you intend to do," said Gertrude, with a little sob for the griefs with which the years had burdened them. "But do

as you see fit. My responsibility in the matter is at an end. You are Conny's father. I give her into your hands for all time! When she comes back from Mrs. Craigie's, tell her. I need not advise you to be careful. Your love for her should make the shock easy for her to bear. You must soften your past in telling her! Be merciful to yourself, as well as to her, I beg of you!"

But Trevor was unrelenting. Gertrude knew, when she gave him her hand, that the interview between him and Conny would be painful to both.

"You would prefer to speak to her alone, I suppose," she said resignedly. "It is better so, since I could not bear to be a spectator of the scene."

"I would not be worthy of calling myself her father if I hid the truth from her!" said Trevor.

He followed Gertrude to the head of the stairs in silence. When she was ready to descend, he said:

"Let us hope that this day will usher in an era of good understanding, as it certainly is the beginning of a sincere relationship between us all. Harmony will mean peace."

"I intend that it should," she told him.

There were tears in her eyes when she reached her rooms; she stood quite still for a few moments in wonder of the changes which time had wrought.

"Poor Marie! Poor Trevor! Poor Conny! Poor dad!" she sighed. Then she asked, "Should I not have brought this about sooner? Or was it destined that his confession should come at a time when Conny most needed it? Well, we are all instruments in the hands of God! I may have acted blindly, but I sought to be just, even as Trevor will be just when he tells why Marie left him. Will Conny bear me any grudge for the silence I imposed upon her father?"

Conny, unaware of the momentous news which

awaited her on her return home, was walking back very slowly after a visit to Mrs. Craigie. She fought her tears until she was on the stairs leading to her "uncle's" rooms. Unwilling to grieve him by showing how she felt, she sat down on the stairs, and had her cry out. By that time she discovered that she wished to be alone. This was a new experience in Conny's life. But the changes in her nature which a few weeks had brought had been many.

Yet when she entered her uncle's rooms, she flew into the embrace of his arms with a sob of gladness. Her nearness left him helpless, and he hardly knew how to begin to tell her what so vitally concerned them both.

"Speak to me," she said. "I am so lonely! It will do me good to hear your voice! I came here for that."

"I do want to speak to you, Constance," he said. "Won't you go over to that chair? I want to talk to you about a most important thing."

"Why can't I sit alongside of you? Let me," she pleaded. "I must hold your hand, so as to feel that you are near me!"

"No, not this time, Constance," he said gently. "Here, let me fix some cushions for you. So! Now you are going to hear a strange story. And you must sit still, and not disturb me!"

Curiosity quieted Conny. When Trevor was ready to speak, he was vividly reminded of his experience during "first nights" of new plays when he had to combat great nervousness.

"What I have to say will sadden you," he began. "I wish with all my heart that it could be helped. But you have faced greater sorrow than this; so you have, in a measure, been prepared for this new trial. Be patient with what you hear."

"There was a man," he commenced his recital, "whose ambition knew no bounds. He lived in a narrow world which shut out God's light from his soul. He wanted his name to ring out over land and sea. He wanted his voice to subjugate men and women. A gesture was to make them thrill. They were to laugh when he smiled, to cry when he was sad.

"In this struggle for mastery, everything else became of little importance. He lived only for applause and praise. These were food to him, his guiding light, his all-in-all. He sought to turn the whole world into a song of laudation. A day had no existence unless he saw in print his name coupled with eulogies of his genius, or heard the roar of approval from audiences. He shook with frightful jealousy when this praise fell to others. He looked upon those who shared in the praise as enemies."

Conny gasped, "What a madman! Did he ever think of loving any one? For that would have made it all different!"

"Would it?" said Trevor sadly. "Let us see if it did! Into the desert of selfishness which surrounded him came a flower, a most glorious one, with which a hero might have been proud to adorn his brow! But if this man placed it there, it was only with the thought of winning thereby more attention. That flower was to serve no other purpose than to bring him more of the much-coveted praise—by making him more conspicuous. He would have put it under foot if it would have served the same purpose."

"Oh!" cried Conny, guessing that this flower was a woman.

"And when the delicate, fragile, exquisite flower," he went on, "asked to be loved rather than to feed a mad ambition——"

"He flung it away!" Conny finished for him in a tone of horror.

Trevor did not face her as he continued, "The girl who came to him—it was her destiny to live the brief life of a flower because of his brutality, and to never know a ray of sunshine because his selfishness made everything about him dark and miserable."

"And he—did he never come to realize what he lost?" asked Conny, the tears large in her eyes.

"When he came to know, it was too late. The flower was dead! Oh, my God! My flower was dead!" cried Trevor, burying his face in his hands, and sobbing out aloud.

Conny could infer only one thing from these words—that the girl who had suffered had been her uncle's own child.

"She came back to your arms to die?" she asked timidly.

"What?" said Trevor. Then as he caught her mistake, he cried, "Can you not guess that it was I who crushed out the life of that flower?"

Conny shrank back and whispered, "Oh, it is impossible! I can't believe it! That is not like you! You, of all persons! You are trying to test me—to see if I believe in you!"

"Ah, my story is not ended," said Trevor sadly. "Before that flower died, a tiny flower, much like herself, was in her arms. My Constance, my Constance, you were that flower! You are the daughter of that madman! You are my own child! It was I who brought your mother—that perfect flower—the grief I have pictured to you! Yes, I am your father! And now you know!"

Had Trevor, in his career as an actor, gone through a scene with the pathos he threw into these last words, the

fame for which he had hungered in those days would never have been withheld. But his tone and gesture just then were not studied. He was too overwhelmed by emotion to act.

Conny stood as if rooted. Finally she murmured:

"My father!"

"Yes," he said. "I punished myself for that past cruelty by keeping silent about the fact. But I had to come here—to be near you. It was not brave of me to come at all. Oh, how hard it has been to be here, to love you, and to say nothing of our relationship! But now that I have told you, I am not so sure that I have done well to break the silence! For I feel that your love is a thing of the past!"

"But—but you cannot be the same man!" said Conny, her hands on her heart—"You who are kind, and thoughtful, and considerate, and so fine! And he!——"

"He was a monster, nothing less!" said Trevor, preparing himself for a terrible blow. Not until that moment did he learn how the years had sapped his strength; and he had to hold on tightly to the chair against which he was leaning, that he might not fall.

"But—but I love you!" said Conny helplessly. "And nothing you have told me seems to make any difference about my love for you!"

She had made things more difficult for Trevor than if she had denied his right to her love.

"But you *should* allow it to make a difference!" he told her unsteadily.

"How can I after you have been so good to me, after you have made me so happy—and Lenny, too!"

"Yet I am the man who was responsible for the terrible grief your mother had to bear!" he insisted.

There was a seemingly long interval of silence. He hardly dared to breathe as he waited. Suddenly Conny clasped her hands, and cried:

"But mother must have forgiven you—because you, too, have suffered! Oh, I know you have! You couldn't love me as much as you do, and not suffer! Yes! Yes! Mother has surely forgiven you!"

Trevor turned away abruptly that Conny might not see his tears. His heaving shoulders told her that he was crying. In a twinkling two arms were about his neck.

"Don't, father!" she begged. "I know how it feels when one's heart hurts and hurts! Oh, yes, I know! Dear, dear father! For now you are really that!"

As the full meaning of the word she had used grew upon her, she clung to him with a feeling of awe. At last he took her in his arms, and they held to each other, and tried to accustom themselves to their new relationship. Then her father asked:

"Will you let me remain with you? Do you think you could bear to have me near after you realize how terrible the past has been?"

"Let you remain?" she cried. "Why, you are always to be near me! Always!" She added gravely, "but you and I are not to stay here. Do you know what we are going to do? We will get some little place, and have a home of our own! A real home! For you and me! Where we will be able to do lots of reading. And we will have a garden. And you will sit at the head of the table. Could there be anything finer, father?"

"There could be nothing finer than a chance to make you happy," he said.

"Ah, you are going to!" she said. "I want so much to

be made happy!" As she nestled closer to him, she told him with a sigh, "I feel so tired-ish!"

Suddenly she started.

"But we haven't told aunt!" she cried. Then she awoke to the fact that Gertrude must have known all along.

"It was she who urged me to do this," said Trevor. "She is a wonderful woman. What do you not owe to her!"

"Yes, yes, I know!" said Conny. "But she and Justin must be alone after they marry. And that will be soon. So you and I, dear dad, are going to have a home of our own. There everything will be quiet. Very quiet. And you must keep me from being afraid when I think of—Lenny!"

"Ah, but you are going to learn to smile again," said her father abruptly, to break the spell of sadness which held her in its grip.

"I don't know that I will ever be able to," she replied.

There was a knock at the door, and a maid asked whether they preferred to have dinner served where they were.

"Tell my aunt yes, if she doesn't mind," said Conny.

"Wasn't that dearly thoughtful of her!" she cried when the maid had shut the door.

"She will not be happy about your going away to live by yourself," said her father.

"That can't be helped. But let us not talk any more. You must be very tired." And Conny placed a pillow under his head.

A ray of sunlight fell athwart his face. Conny noted the many wrinkles, the weary, sad eyes, and the hollow cheeks. Pity and love overwhelmed her. How old he looked! How broken! What a storm-tossed soul his had been!

"Yes," said Conny to herself, "I must learn to smile! Soon!"

CHAPTER XVIII

Into the home which Conny created for herself and her father came many of her former suitors. They found her very changed, and could not accustom themselves to her long spells of silence. The new way in which she addressed the worn, nervous man who occupied the places of honor at the pretty house was another feature that filled them with surprise—as much so as the fact that she had gone into a home of her own.

If they thought that the last was the result of any differences with Gertrude, they were soon disabused of the idea, for Gertrude was often to be seen at the house, and was always affectionately received. Yet she was frequently left unhappy after these visits. She told Justin:

"Conny does not seem to be getting back to her old self at all! You must have noticed that far-away look of hers."

"Not when I am around! I get her talking about the flowers she is to plant in her garden," he said, "or about her father's new books. Catch me sitting silent in that place!"

"Yes, but I am dreaming of a completer sort of home for her!" said Gertrude; "where a man will restore her gayheartedness, and where her beauty will shine with a wholesome power, and not be eaten up by sadness. I want my Conny happy—the Conny I gave so many years to!"

"Perhaps she would not remain so unhappy if she did not keep visiting Mrs. Craigie," Justin suggested.

"Oh, I could not speak to her about that!" cried Gertrude.

Conny visited the bereaved mother every day. Their talk at first would deal with Conny's housekeeping, but it would always slowly veer about until one of them found courage to speak Lenny's name, and then both women would be left too tremulous for words.

Once Mrs. Craigie suggested that Conny and her father should come to live with her. The girl shrank from the thought of being constantly in the presence of so many reminders of Lenny. Mrs. Craigie guessed the reason for the silence with which her offer was met, and said:

"I should not have asked it. I keep forgetting that you are but a child, and that sorrow has laid its hand too heavily on you as it is."

"Be sure that I will always be near you," said Conny, as she kissed the white brow on which lines were already showing themselves.

They were saved from the pain of continuing the trying talk by the maid's entrance with Justin's name.

His visits to Lenny's mother were a great trial to him, and he came only at long intervals, depending upon Gertrude to atone for this by frequent visits of her own. He was less backward about going to Conny, who always brightened perceptibly when he came. As soon as spring was fully ushered in, both devoted themselves to her garden. Justin found many spare moments in which to throw off his coat and to handle a spade.

"It is all the exercise I get," he said when Conny one day protested against his neglect of his work in town.

"But I don't see how you can spare the time," she said, "with your politics and law!"

"Ah," he said, with a twinkle in his eye, "I am even going to find time to get married soon. So there you are! I tell you, there's nothing of the idler about me!" he added with a laugh.

He had said to Gertrude that very day: "Let us make it September. I want to feel that I have covered considerable ground in my work; and by fall I'll have something to show for what I am doing. Although things are moving astonishingly well, I don't want to slow up. I want to go right on all summer. You are not to talk to me about taking a vacation. I feel this year that I can do without one."

And as Gertrude noted the suggestion of healthy color on the cheeks which had been white for many months, she breathed, "Thank God!"

He was always bringing her happy surprises. On one occasion he told her:

"I have come across a most clever young chap—found him making his way through a preparatory school on the quiet while working at the Lotus Club. He was interested in law. I told him that I would take him into the office, so that he would have time to study and be near law books, while at the same time his income would be boosted a bit. But I attached a condition."

"I can guess it!" said Gertrude with a happy smile.

"Of course, I knew you would! Yes, I insisted he was to quit smoking. If he didn't, our bargain was off! He has given up his cigarettes, and it is interesting to watch the fight he is putting up against the habit. I'm on the spot to help. I have promised myself that when I get a bigger say in public affairs—and I don't think that time is as far distant as it was—I'll help to make it an offence to

sell cigarettes. Drink don't compare with it, for no one goes around sipping from a flask in the open highway, while a mere child will puff away at a cigarette, and be proud of it!"

"Do you think Lenny's mother knows what was really responsible for his death?" Gertrude asked for the first time, softly, so as not to wound Justin.

"No," he said, drawing a long breath. "It seems that one of the curses of the cigarette is the tendency it has of getting its victims to make light of its effect upon them. Yet I forgot that Lenny knew, and that he told Conny!"

Justin often pondered, "Did his mother ever learn how the large sum of money was spent? Does she know about the sums he received from Bob Maur?"

That man studiously avoided passing Mrs. Craigie's home when he went to the station in the morning on his way to business. This, however, ceased when he invested in an automobile. During his visits to Conny, he never mentioned either Leonard's name or that of Mrs. Craigie.

He carried his well-groomed person into the small home with a proud air, and overlooked the indifferent reception accorded him. Conny would have met him with greater friendliness if the purpose of his visits had not been apparent to her. As soon as he discovered this, he pretended that for the time being he was not bent on doing any courting, but he could not altogether conceal his love.

Despite his care, on one occasion his impatience with Conny's grief for Leonard almost cost him his standing in the house. He had allowed himself to comment on the sombre clothes which Conny wore, which were in marked contrast to the gay attire of which she had been so fond in the past.

"You know, oh, you must surely know why I wear this!" Conny said.

"But it is impossible to be happy about you while you cover yourself with hideous things like that!" he replied.

Conny's eyes flashed.

"Your visits pain me," she said sternly.

At once he was on his knees in apology. When this did not appease her, he blurted out:

"You will yet learn that I, too, was his friend, and that I tried to help him in that critical period. Don't be prejudiced against me, Conny. You have always been so fair! If I am impatient, it is not out of a desire to be unkind to his memory. You will never know how close to each other he and I came. If he had only listened to me!"

Startled by his words, she asked him to tell her more.

"No, I cannot—out of respect for his memory," he replied; and so silenced her, although he had at a bound risen in her esteem.

As a result, his visits grew more frequent, but were timed so as not to conflict with those of Justin. One afternoon, however, the latter came at an unexpected hour to get through some spading in Conny's garden, and was surprised to find Maur lounging familiarly in the sitting-room.

"Conny ought to be here any moment," said Maur, suppressing a yawn. His careless air, though, was assumed. In reality, he was taking stock of the changes in Justin, and was much surprised at that man's somewhat robust appearance.

Justin was about to turn on his heel and to give himself to the work for which he had come, when Maur interposed:

"I'd like to have a talk with you, Mahan, if you'll sit down. Don't hurry off!"

"I can't imagine what you would want to say to me, Mr. Maur," came in chilly tones.

"Well, *I* can't imagine why you should go up in the air the moment I look at you!" Maur exclaimed resentfully. Then he claimed, "Why, I was telling my partner only today that you were just the man for some work we have! You're mistaken about me—entirely! And you are the last man I would believe capable of petty prejudices, too!"

"Thank you," said Justin. He almost lost his temper when he declared, "I haven't the least desire to do any of your work or your partner's. It isn't because I happen to know of some crookedness of your firm, either."

"That's a lie!" shouted Maur, growing scarlet.

"Well, since one of my clients happened to be involved, you will find out in a few days whether I am lying or not," said Justin, quite calm now. "I imagine you wanted me to defend you in just that suit when you suggested my name to your partner. But my wish to have nothing to do with you outside of a court-room springs from other causes. However, I have no desire just now to discuss my reasons for disliking you. Good-by!"

"Oh, I know how happy you are to think that you have caught me tripping in business!" sneered Maur. "But if you make out a case against me, I will give five thousand dollars to any charity organization you may name. Your clients are pretty nearly on a par with you in intelligence. Just because Mr. Jermon got squeezed on the market—but why should I argue with you? You're an example of blind prejudice!"

"It may be that my client will not be able to make out a good case against you," said Justin. "And I would be the last one to give a man the benefit of the doubt because

he was my client. But where it concerns you, I have reason to believe that he may not be very far in the wrong."

"And what the devil may that reason be?" cried Maur. "It's fortunate that we are in this house, or you'd have to mend your speech! If I didn't respect Conny, I might have a hard time forgetting in whose house I was!"

"Oh, you do respect something!" said Justin. "I imagine that is rather trying. As for making me mend my speech, are you not afraid that if you tried, it might make things very hard for you? But suppose we close the incident without any further parley."

"You're mysterious now, aren't you?" Maur snapped. "But I have very little fear of you. I never was afraid of a man who was fond of people without character, who was sentimental about nobodies, and an enemy of those who stand on their own feet. That is the reason you dislike me! You are prejudiced against people who get along. Well, I am proud that you cannot call me your friend! Continue to swear by weaklings! Although in one case it didn't help one person!"

"So!" cried Justin, growing pale. He wondered if Lenny had told this man what he had told Conny. He doubted it. But Justin now felt that only one course was open to him—to show Maur that he was partially to blame for Lenny's death. Justin was confident that but for Maur's loans Lenny would never have gone as far as he did.

As the two men faced each other, Justin knew there was no going back now. The fight was on to a finish. "If it will save Conny from him, it will have served some purpose!" he reflected. He said to Maur:

"As long as you did not drag in Leonard Craigie, I could have let everything pass. But we have gone too far

to recede. It was Lenny you meant. Denial would be of little use, for it seems that the dead as well as the living must serve your purpose!"

"I don't know what you are talking about," said Maur. "Of course, if you want to discuss Lenny Craigie, why, go ahead. I can guess what your oratory will consist of. You'll make me out a sort of devil, because you believe he was a sort of angel. Well, go ahead! We might as well quarrel until Conny comes."

His show of patience exasperated Justin, who cried:

"No one is assuming Leonard to have been an angel! Don't make comparisons like that, or I'll make one. Suppose I say that you tried to play angel to Lenny's devil! How does that strike you?"

"As an attempt to be smart, if not impertinent!" Maur replied, somewhat uneasily.

"I'll make it clearer, then. Suppose you let me do what I have wanted to do for some time—to pay you back the money Lenny borrowed from you." Maur started. Justin pretended not to notice this, and went on, "I did not care to approach you about it before, because explanations would have been necessary, and I was afraid of losing my temper. But we might as well have it out right here. I do not suppose Mrs. Craigie knew of her son's indebtedness to you——"

"If you are so thoroughly acquainted with the facts," Maur broke in, coming quite close, and speaking in a low but mocking voice, "Why didn't you lend him the two thousand dollars?"

"Because it was too late!" said Justin. "Perhaps you think Lenny came to me, and made a clean breast of his difficulties! If he had done so in time, he would be alive to-day. I'll tell you how I found out. I was in the Lotus

Club when he and you met by appointment. What is more, I was in the next room! That is how I got to know of the peculiar way in which you were helping Lenny."

Maur, agitated, stepped back.

"So you listened, did you?" was all he could say.

"Such a thing must sound very dishonorable to you," Justin replied. "But, in reality, I didn't mean to be listening! I was dozing in the next room when your voices aroused me. Of course, after I got the gist of Lenny's difficulty, I was not going to run away! Oh, if I had only known sooner! Why didn't he come to me? Why didn't he remember that I was his friend?"

He hardly saw the man before him as he gave vent to his grief in these words. Maur asked defiantly:

"What else have you got to say to me? I think I've had enough of your posing!"

"I have only one more thing to say," Justin told him. Then he got out in icy tones, "I have been wondering ever since that day at the Lotus Club how you came to lend Leonard Craigie money. It is because I don't believe in your honesty that I have had certain suspicions about your motives in opening your purse to him. I will be glad if you will offer some explanation of your friendship for Lenny—for you made it clear some moments ago that you fairly detest the memory of him. How much more then must you have hated him when he was alive!"

Maur cried furiously, "When you say I had some crooked reason for lending him money, you lie! No one, except with a mind as foul as yours, could manufacture such a charge! Why should I not have loaned him small sums when he came whining to me? And why should I not have refused to lend him two thousand dollars in a lump sum? I did want to do him a favor. But when I guessed

where the money was going, and saw that there was a chance of trouble which might involve me, I was done with him! So would you have been! You may believe what I have told you, or you may not! But I repeat that your foul insinuations could only come from a coward! If you ever make them public, I will horsewhip you! I am not afraid of you, Justin Mahan!"

Instead of losing his temper, Justin sought to gain the upper hand by coolly driving home certain facts.

"Despite all your fine words," he said, "I cannot be convinced that you did not gloat over Lenny's predicament that day at the Lotus Club. I can hear even now the tones in which you mocked at him! It is true that I can prove nothing. But I could take my oath that you just played with him that afternoon for the fun of it. It was done with a brutality which horrifies me as I look back! Against your fine phrases I have only to pit the way in which you spoke to him, and I am satisfied that I have done you no injustice. So how can I believe that you meant well when you loaned him the money? And now I am ready to pay whatever the sum amounted to. You have only to name the figure!"

"You hound, you lie when you say I had a double motive!" cried Maur. "Come outside, and you will get something else than money to remember this by, you sneak! I tell you, you are a liar! And I will make you admit it before we leave this house!"

Both grew tense as they realized that a third person had come into the room. They remembered, as Conny stood before them, that they had spoken very loudly, and that their voices must have carried to the hall below where Conny had most likely overheard them.

"Did he die because of the need of money?" she asked

plaintively. Then she grieved, "He did not come to me when I could have helped him! And he could have come! Why didn't he? I could have saved him! Oh, that he should have killed himself for want of money!"

"It can do no good to talk about it now," said Justin gently. "You are not alone in your regret of his refusal to come to his friends when they could have helped him."

Conny turned upon Maur.

"Can it be true that you maliciously lent Leonard money?" she asked. "Because I could never look in your face again with that hanging over you! Why, it is horrible!"

"You heard me say that he lied, did you not?" was the reply. "This man, for some reason or other, does not like me; so he invents this terrible fiction. It's a fearful charge! He will yet withdraw it, if I have my way!"

"But why should Lenny ever have gone to you for money?" she demanded. "You and he never got along. You fairly hated each other!"

"His letters to me, written just before he died, will show the very opposite," said Maur. "Remember, I did lend him money! While you will find out, for the mere asking, that Justin Mahan, Lenny's supposed friend, did not come forward with the necessary funds which would have saved him from suicide! Why does he keep harping on my unkindness and overlook that fact?"

Conny turned glazed eyes upon Justin, and her startled look hurried him into words quicker than the accusation itself.

"My conscience is clear on that score," he said; "and this man's guess, thank God, is wrong! I did draw two thousand dollars from my bank within a few hours after

discovering Lenny's predicament. But it was useless for his purpose then. He should have had it a day before."

"Of course, we will have to take your word for that!" said Maur quickly, his manner very incredulous.

"Not at all," Justin replied. "I have proofs of the help I wished to extend Lenny. Here are the keys to my desk. In one of the drawers you will find my check-book. My check-stubs will show that I drew two thousand dollars from my bank on the day of the suicide. I returned it on the next. The money had come too late! Why had he not appealed to me instead of to you from the first? But he shunned me, as he shunned Conny! It is all too frightful for words!"

At that moment he relived Lenny's despair at the Lotus Club when Maur had refused him help.

Maur was saying, "How could I have known he was going to commit suicide if I did not at once deliver over to him two thousand dollars? I was frightened to think that he should need such a sum! The only course open to him, it seemed to me, was for him to go to his mother and to make a clean breast of his troubles. I cannot understand why he did not go. As it was, I saw the danger to myself of being drawn deeper and deeper into his difficulties. So I decided that he must tell his mother everything, and to force that I refused him the money. You see, Conny, I had his welfare in mind. You would have done the same thing."

Justin was silent, and he refused to answer when Conny asked:

"Didn't you say that he," pointing to Maur, "seemed to gloat over Lenny's predicament?"

"He won't say 'Yes'!" cried Maur. "He dare not per-

jure his soul by such a terrible statement! He knows he may have been deceived at the time!"

But the attack came from a new direction.

"I remember," said Conny sternly, "that you were in unusually fine spirits during the time when you must have been lending Lenny those sums of money. I remember it distinctly! And there was one day—two evenings before his death—when you came to the house, and you spent an entire hour laughing at trifles! Oh, how abominable!"

Trembling with anger, yet showing much of the self-command which was to serve him in his climb for moneyed power, Maur made a last stand. He was conscious that the battle was lost, but he was determined not to leave the field with a beaten air.

"You would still call me a liar," he said, "if I told you that during the time of which you speak, I was made cheerful by several fine strokes of business which fell to my partner and myself. You have heaped terrible accusations upon me, and are driving me from your home! You will have to answer to your conscience for that! If this has been a terrible blow to me, it has at the same time been of value, since it proved to me, Constance, how impossible it is for us to have anything in common. I know that I am bigger than you all, just as I know that you will all deeply regret your wild words. So I forgive you. Yes, although you think you have humbled me, I forgive you! As for my love for you, I take it and trample it under foot as something unworthy of me! I am sorry for myself, but, oh, Conny, how sorry I am for you!"

For an instant she was tempted to talk things over; but Maur gave her no chance. He passed her with a haughty bow, and slowly descended the stairs. As he took his hat and cane in the hall, he saw Trevor, who had just come in,

"What is your haste?" asked Conny's father.

"Should not one fly from one's enemies?" was the reply.

And Maur took himself off with his head high in the air.

"There was no use staying," he said to himself. "She would never have married me with that hanging over us. If I ever get a chance to square accounts with Justin Mahan, won't I, though!"

Justin had given voice to only one word when Maur was heard shutting the door:

"Hypocrite!"

"Yes! Yes!" cried Conny. "I feel instinctively that he is one! Why did you not warn me before? And now I have learned all those terrible things! Surely, surely, there will be nothing more to learn!"

Justin mentally remarked, "Not if it is in my power to prevent it!"

He was satisfied with the manner in which she had kept herself in hand during Maur's eloquence. It showed that she was no longer the impulsive girl who could not be trusted to make her way through shams.

As Justin set to work in the garden, he was inclined, however, to feel somewhat sorry for Maur.

"I laid on the whip too heavily," he said. "It was a terrible defeat for him. And I must remember that I, too, worked harm in Lenny's life, even though I did so unconsciously!"

After an interval, Conny joined him. He dared not look up at her, and worked on silently. She asked:

"Do you think we will have lots of flowers?"

Wondering how she could give any thought to so secondary a matter after the storm through which she had just

passed, he said briefly, "I think so," adding, "You will certainly have a pretty spot here in two months!"

"It is not that! I want them because—because——"

She broke off with a sob.

"I know," said Justin gently. "You will have many for his resting place."

And a tear slowly trickled down his cheek.

CHAPTER XIX

There were two places in Mrs. Craigie's home constantly filled with flowers—the Captain's library and Lenny's bedroom. And her time, when she was not visiting the graves, or receiving her many visitors, was divided between the two rooms. The strength she could command for the continual climbing of the stairs in going from the library to Lenny's bedroom was remarkable. She would not allow Mrs. Mulholland to help her. It was sweet labor for her to toil up the stairs, and to totter into the quiet chamber where Lenny had slept.

There she would spend her time rearranging his clothes, or going over the gifts she had given him from year to year, or doing other things which brought him quite close to her. It filled her with joy to take up and study his first scrawl, and to read the letters he had written his father when the Captain was cruising—in both instances the child's moving hand as real to her as when it had moved over the pages she fingered.

To the treasures of the room she had added all the remembrances Lenny had given her. These had a place on the bureau with his jewelry. His favorite books were in a little heap on a table within reach of the chair, in which he had always preferred to lounge, near the window. The tokens from the baseball league adorned the walls. The newspaper mention of the league had been clipped, and were pasted into a scrap-book, which was also kept in that room.

Lenny's linen, scented, lay in the bureau, to be often touched by his mother's caressing hands. The first pair of shoes he had worn shared a place with the last.

In the drawer of his table lay his unfinished manuscript, blotted in many places with tears. Again and again had his mother considered the advisability of publishing the finished chapters, only to decide that the written words were for her, and for no one else.

"He cannot mean to others what he means to me!" she would say.

Hovering over these reminders, his mother always felt him within reach. So she clung to them with longing fingers, and murmured his name, until her grief would fling her sobbing across his bed, her arms about the pillow where his head had rested.

She was to spend in that room many nights as sleepless as his had been. At those times, she would often call his name, first softly, then louder and louder, her arms outstretched. There were times when she was certain that he pillowed his head within the circle of her arms.

There were also periods of self-accusation, in which she would charge:

"I did not watch over his welfare sufficiently! I should have seen how troubled he was. I should have been the friend to him I had planned to be. He would never have gone from me if I had taken care! And he was slipping further and further away, and I did not put out a hand to keep him! How blind I was! To have called myself his mother, and not to have safe-guarded his life! It was not that I trusted him too much! He did not trust *me* enough! I should have brought his friends into this house, and then those who were unworthy of him would never have had any influence. Instead, I let him wander about, aimlessly, to choose his companions in a boy's way, and to let

them drag him down to destruction. Oh, my Lenny, I could have kept you, against all the world, if I had taken care!"

One day, as she sat musing, a thought presented itself which she had not seen with distinctness before.

"His cigarette smoking was at the bottom of his troubles!"

She got to her feet with a terrible cry. Extending her arms with a gesture of profound despair, she asked:

"Can it have cost me both husband and son? Then I have indeed allowed Lenny to go to his death without putting out a restraining hand!"

She fell to the floor as if stricken.

* * * * * * * *

Gertrude and Justin came to see Conny on an evening some days later when they had instinctively felt that she needed them. So it proved, for she exclaimed:

"How did you know I was lonely? Perhaps it was because I really wished very hard that you would find time for me. I have been so restless all day!"

As they passed the little parlor, Conny held up a warning finger. Her father was dozing in a seat near the lamp. They tiptoed to another room.

"He's always falling asleep in the evening," she said. "My reading to him don't keep him awake, although he is always so sorry about it! He wants to keep awake by reading to me, but I won't let him. His eyes are not strong. He is more nervous than ever, too, and he hardly gets about! I am sure he looks very old! Doesn't he?"

They denied this. Justin said:

"His actor's life was very trying; and this, coupled with his natural nervousness, was bound to tell on him. Rest for a few years will make him a well man again."

But Conny knew better, although she hardly dared to tell

herself the truth. Despite her hints, Trevor refused to see a physician. Conny complained of this as she made her visitors comfortable.

"Don't insist that he should!" Justin advised. "Why should you worry him about his health?"

Then he hastened to change the topic of conversation. Their plans for the summer came up for discussion. Justin was obdurate about wanting to stay in town. Conny wanted to remain so as to spend as much time as possible at a stretch in her new home.

"As if it wasn't because of your garden!" Justin teased her.

"And what are you growing in *your* garden?" she asked, seriously.

"A lot of clients and some political hopes," he replied.

He spoke of his chances of being the "dark horse" at the primaries which were to nominate a councilman.

"Do you know who is beginning to take a quiet hand in politics?" he asked. "Robert Maur! I know his purpose. It is to kill my chances for office. Another client of mine has complained about Maur's methods. Sooner or later there will be an explosion, and then that gentleman will do his business on a more honest basis."

"Won't such an explosion drive him out of politics?" asked Conny.

"Not with his money," said Justin. "And I can see that my whole political future will mean a series of extended fights with him. It adds zest to life to know that I can serve the community by keeping him out of office. You would be surprised to learn how many members of Lenny's league of baseball clubs have begun to gather around me as a political following, simply because I was associated with Lenny in the work. No, there is no reason to fear Maur!"

The mention of the dead boy's name had made Conny's

head droop. As Gertrude was about to go over to her, Justin sprang up with a cry.

"There's a fire in the neighborhood!" he exclaimed.

They rushed to the window. After a glance, Conny burst out:

"Why, it's either your house, Gertrude, or Mrs. Craigie's!"

"It is Mrs. Craigie's!" said Justin.

In a moment they had joined the crowd streaming toward the place.

"I was dimly conscious of some excitement on the street," Justin remembered, as they arrived on the main thoroughfare and began to elbow their way hurriedly through the mass of people moving in the direction of the fire. "Of course Mrs. Craigie can be in no danger," he said reassuringly. "She does not retire early. And Mrs. Mulholland is always with her, you know."

"Her wandering about the house must have done it!" Conny moaned.

She had hit upon the cause. Mrs. Craigie, after visiting Lenny's room, had not given any heed to the match with which she lighted the gas there, and a spark slowly worked itself into a flame, and soon the room was in a blaze. How could the worn body have known its old caution? It was resting wearily on the porch when the alarm of fire sounded through the house.

Only one thought dominated the bereaved woman when she learned what had happened. Gathering all her strength, she rushed up to the library and snatched from its place on the wall the tribute from the President of the United States to her husband. From there she was ready to fly to Lenny's room. But a wall of flame opposed her. Mrs. Mulholland, however, was forced to hold her tightly, lest she should defy death and cross into that room.

Almost carrying the frail form, Mrs. Mulholland helped her down to the hall and, snatching up some wraps, took the half-fainting woman out of reach of danger. But Mrs. Craigie would not leave the scene and, standing in the street, she watched with streaming eyes the destruction of her home.

It was thus that Conny and Gertrude found her when they pushed the neighbors aside and took her in their arms. Justin had at once approached a friend who had come to the scene in an automobile, and suggested that he should put Mrs. Craigie in it, and take her to Gertrude's home.

"My dear fellow," said the other, "we have all tried to get her away from the place. She won't go. I suppose you can't blame her for wanting to stay. The house is doomed with that increasing wind and our poor water supply at this particular place. Poor Mrs. Craigie! Phew, aren't those upper portions going fast, though! That is the library burning now, eh? A thousand pities! It was certainly a beautiful home! And with what it has meant to her, I don't see how she will bear the loss of it!"

Justin, deep down in his heart was not sorry that the terrible reminders of Lenny were going up in flame.

"No woman could stand the strain of handling every day the belongings of one who had been lost to her!" he reflected.

Lenny's mother was grieving, "Not a thing left me! Everything gone! All in an hour! A little while ago I could touch what they had loved and what had been theirs! Now there is nothing!"

Conny suddenly slipped away. When Gertrude persisted in her pleading with Mrs. Craigie that she should give up the heart-rending task of watching the destruction of her home, and should come to hers, the older woman asked:

"But where is she?—Where is Conny?"

There was not a sign of her. Then some one remembered that she had hurried away but a moment before. As Mrs. Craigie stood looking at the blazing shell which had been her home, Justin, who had guided the automobile within reach, lifted her into it before she could object.

"You will only catch cold if you remain," he said simply, but insistently.

He put Gertrude in beside her, and then clambered in to take the wheel.

As they made their way out of the crowd, Mrs. Craigie leaned forward and said:

"Justin, take me to Conny."

When the automobile turned the corner of the street where her home had occupied a proud position, she looked back at the blazing ruins and burst into tears. Gertrude folded her into her arms and spoke soothing words, although on the verge of tears herself.

"It was the place that sheltered my boy and his father!" sobbed Mrs. Craigie.

"I know! I know!" said Gertrude.

The automobile came to a stop. Mrs. Craigie, helped out by Justin, did not wait for his arm. Summing up surprising strength, she hurried up the narrow path towards the small house. Before she could lay her hand upon the bell, the door was pulled open and Conny had her arms about the neck of the homeless woman.

"Conny," said the latter, "will you shelter me?"

"I was all ready for you, mother!" came in reply. "I knew you would find your way here! I knew! That's the reason I stole back and waited! You're to be with me for all time!"

And as the lips of the two women met in a long kiss Justin and Gertrude silently slipped away.

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